



# THE INDEPENDENT

Nº 3,294

MONDAY 12 MAY 1997

WEATHER: Sunny spells; heavy showers later

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MEDIA+

**THE CARTOONIST'S  
VIEW OF BLAIR**

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DEBORAH ROSS INTERVIEW

**I LIKE  
JOHN REDWOOD.  
REALLY, I DO**

JOHN WALSH

**A WEEKEND  
AT MONACO**  
BACK PAGE

**24**  
PAGES OF  
SPORT

## Brown eyes the lottery jackpot

### Early Budget will shake up welfare

Colin Brown  
and Diane Coyle

Gordon Brown, the Chancellor, is preparing to put the squeeze on profits from the National Lottery and give himself scope for some of the most radical welfare reforms in 50 years. Mr Brown was taking time off at the Spurs match in north London yesterday with Alan Sugar, the club chairman and one of Labour's big business backers, but is preparing to match the radical zeal of the Government's first 10 days with a far-reaching Budget which could be brought forward to 10 June.

#### Brown's targets

- Reduction in VAT on household fuel from 8 per cent to 5 per cent
- New council housing building programme funded by the phased release of £5bn in capital receipts
- £5bn windfall profits tax on privatised utilities
- A welfare to work scheme to take 250,000 under-25s off the dole
- New taxes to deter quick profits on shares
- A fundamental long-term review of spending

The cornerstone of the package will be a £5bn windfall profits tax on the privatised utilities, possibly including BT, to fulfil Labour's election manifesto commitment to get £50,000 under 25-year-olds off the dole and into jobs or training schemes.

Camelot will escape the windfall profits tax, but Mr Brown is expected to seek negotiations with the company to allow more of its £1m-a-week profits to go towards good causes. One senior source said: "There is a contract which we cannot break unilaterally. But we can make it worth their while."

The writing will be put on the wall for Camelot this week in the Queen's

Speech with a bill to transfer the lottery to a non-profit-making operator from 2001, when Camelot's contract runs out.

There were clear signals yesterday that Mr Brown will go further than the welfare-to-work package promised during the general election by seeking to close the gap between rich and poor, possibly by making progress towards his target of lower rate of income tax of 10p in the pound.

Peter Mandelson, Minister without portfolio, said the Budget would contain "the most significant welfare changes that we've seen in our country for 50 years". Any young person claiming benefit will face four options: a £60 a week subsidy to an employer, a top-up payment for taking up voluntary work or joining an environmental task force, and full-time education or training.

An announcement that the European Commission will accept the VAT move despite its potential conflict with EU rules is likely after today's meeting of finance ministers in Brussels.

Tony Blair's reforming agenda will be stepped up today by Robin Cook, the Foreign Secretary, with a mission statement informing British diplomats overseas that Britain will play a more positive role in Europe, and give greater priority to human rights. It will foreshadow moves to end the export of landmines.

The Queen's speech will contain measures to incorporate the European Convention on Human Rights into UK law, and a total ban on the private ownership of all handguns, including .22 guns, which were expected to be exempt.

The Chancellor is considering including changes to capital gains tax and corporation tax to encourage more long-term investment and share ownership. Changes are also expected on dividends and pensions, to limit tax relief to the lower rate of income tax for top rate earners.

Options such as phasing out mortgage interest relief would help keep the lid on consumer spending as peo-



Spur of the moment: The Chancellor, Gordon Brown, signing autographs yesterday before his visit to White Hart Lane for the Tottenham v Coventry match. Photograph: Emma Boam

ple receive their £25bn building society share windfall this summer and autumn.

Kenneth Clarke, the former Chancellor, accused the Chancellor of being in "a tearing hurry" with measures which threatened to slow down the economy.

Mr Clarke, a Tory leadership contender, warned Mr Brown that "play-

ing about with corporation taxation, taxation on investment, as he's proposing, is very dangerous indeed. He has already raised interest rates."

"He looks as if he's going to raise the tax burdens overall on corporate taxation, on savings and investment. All that is going to have a marked effect on the economy which I think is unnecessary."

Mr Brown said in an interview for the *Observer* yesterday that ministers will not be able to change their departmental spending totals for two years. The BMA is seeking a meeting this week with Frank Dobson, the Health Secretary, to raise their concerns for health spending.

Sources close to Stephen Dorrell, the former Health Secretary, have

told *The Independent* that the funds in the Treasury books are inadequate for the NHS, with a rise of only 0.3 per cent in real terms for next year.

Public sector pay is likely to be squeezed for a further two years.

A likely early move is a reduction in the tax credit on Advanced Corporation Tax, as this credit means pension funds pressure companies to

pay high dividends. Mr Brown will introduce a medium-term growth strategy alongside the Treasury's existing medium-term financial strategy, stressing the Government's commitment to high and sustainable employment and a higher long-term growth rate.

Brown and Brussels, page 9  
Leading article, page 14

## Triads and China do Hong Kong deal

Stephen Vines  
Hong Kong

The Chinese government has done a deal with triad criminal gangs to ensure the smooth handover of Hong Kong, a former senior Chinese official has revealed.

Wong Man-fong, a former deputy secretary-general of the New China News Agency (NCNA) in Hong Kong, China's de facto embassy, told an academic forum over the weekend that he had held meetings "to befriend" triad leaders before the signing of the 1994 agreement with Britain for the trans-

fer of sovereignty. He is quoted as saying: "I told them that what the administration wanted was a peaceful return and that they could not attempt to do anything to upset Hong Kong's prosperity and stability."

In return China pledged to turn a blind eye to triad activities, which include drug running, loan sharking, protection rackets and running prostitution rings. Mr Wong did not say so, but it is reliably understood that during his long period as a Xinhua official from 1949 to 1992 he became the main link man between the Chinese government and the triads, hold-

ing regular meetings with triad leaders in the border town of Shenzhen.

Mr Wong's comments provide the first real confirmation of the reasons behind some extraordinary comments by Chinese leaders in recent years. In 1984, the paramount leader, Deng Xiaoping, said - referring to triads, "there are many good guys among them." China's security minister described the triads as containing "patriotic elements" and said they helped provide protection for the overseas visit of a senior Chinese leader.

Mr Wong, one of the few former senior Chinese officials in

Hong Kong to speak in public about his past activities, was poised to publish a full account of China's links with the triads in 1994, but was thwarted after pressure was brought to bear by Chinese officials who got wind of his plans.

One major problem for China was to secure the support of the powerful Sun Yee On gang which had been close to anti-Communist Taiwan. However, in late 1984, Xu Jiatun, the head of the NCNA, acting on Mr Wong's advice, invited the so-called "dragon heads" or bosses of the Sun Yee On to meetings at which something akin to

a peace pact was signed. The other two big gangs, the 14K and Wo On Lok (better-known as Shui Fong) triads were more co-operative from the start, appreciating the benefits of association with China in return for non-interference from Peking.

Mr Wong did not say so, but the current outbreak of triad warfare in the neighbouring colony of Macau, is precisely the sort of thing which China was keen to avoid in Hong Kong. Ironically, political relations with Macau's Portuguese rulers have been far better than with Hong Kong's British rulers, but the handover of power in Macau

is being seriously undermined by a series of triad-linked assassinations in broad daylight.

"I made the point of warning them [the triad leaders] that the Communist Party was not someone they wanted to mess with," said Mr Wong.

About 30,000 triad members are said to be operating in Hong Kong. The triads originated as patriotic anti-Manchu societies opposed to the rule over China by the Manchurian Qing dynasty in the 18th century. The triads, known in Chinese, as "black societies", quickly degenerated into criminality.

Quiet hero, page 11

#### QUICKLY

##### Smear test row

A cervical smear test sold to women with the claim that it is more accurate than that used by the NHS has been criticised by doctors and NHS managers who say it is undermining the national screening service. Page 4

##### Pope holds back

Pope John Paul II made no direct criticism of Syria or of the thousands of troops it keeps in Lebanon or of the domination it exercises over the Lebanese government during the student mass he held at the mountain of Harissa yesterday. Page 10

##### Boro relegated

Defeats for Middlesbrough and Sunderland meant they joined Nottingham Forest yesterday in being relegated from the Premier League. Both were leapfrogged by Coventry City who won at Spurs. Sport section

## 'Pupils should write more.' Discuss

Judith Judd  
Education Editor

The art of history essay-writing is in decline and government examination advisers are trying to revive it. Experts say teaching methods which often require pupils to produce no more than a few words or a paragraph at a time are threatening the traditional essay.

Changes in exams for 16-year-olds, with the ending of O-levels and the introduction of the GCSE, have also played down the essay's importance. The School Curriculum and Assessment Authority has just produced a booklet with tips for teachers of 11- to 14-year-olds on how to instruct pupils in the art of "extended writing" in history.

Nick Tate, the authority's chief executive, said: "We feel there has been a drift away from extended writing in history, particularly in terms of the GCSE exam... In the old O-level history exam candidates had to write five essays in two and a half hours. When GCSE came in there was a feeling that people should be doing other things in history besides writing essays."

From next year, new rules for GCSE history will make it clear that all candidates have to answer at least one essay-type question. The booklet suggests ways in which pupils of all abilities in the first years of secondary school can be taught to produce essays and narrative writing by sorting, selecting and arranging their material.

It offers menus of "sentence starters" and contents for pupils to choose from and suggests they arrange cards which each contain a point to be included in an essay on why the Normans won the battle of Hastings.

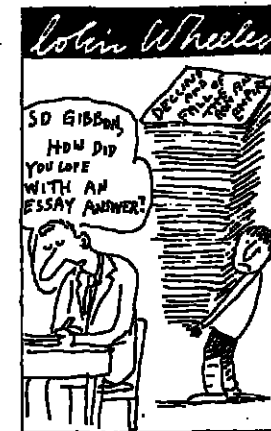
Dr Tate said that expectations of what lower ability pupils could do were too modest. When the authority circulated examples of extended writing, some teachers had reacted with hostility, arguing that the work was too difficult for the less able.

Chris Husband of Warwick University's Institute of Education, one of the consultants for the booklet, said it was not just exam changes which had led to problems over extended writing. "The vast majority of writing that kids get asked to do in

school is pretty low level. It asks them to make short-term decisions and then write one-word or short sentence answers."

In the Seventies, he said, teachers had reacted against the tradition of dictating pages of notes by producing their own worksheets. "What was lost in the process was the sense of putting history back together."

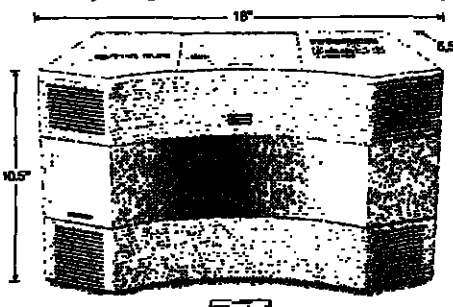
Christine Connell, chair of the Historical Association's secondary education committee, on whose work the booklet is based, said it showed how history could be used to improve literacy and thinking skills. History was one of the few subjects which still demanded extended analysis and discussion. She said: "For good reasons, teachers have sometimes swung too far to-



wards making writing accessible." Exam officials point out that the essay continues to play an important part in English courses.

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## significant shorts

## Aborigine claims ancestor's head from British grave

An Aboriginal leader is travelling to Britain to ask for the return of the head of one of his ancestors, which is buried in a Liverpool cemetery.

Ken Colbung is hoping for a meeting with Jack Straw, the Home Secretary, after the Home Office refused to allow the head of Yagan, an early 19th-century Aboriginal leader, to be exhumed. The licence to disinter the head from Everton Cemetery was not granted because relatives of children buried in the same grave have not given their consent.

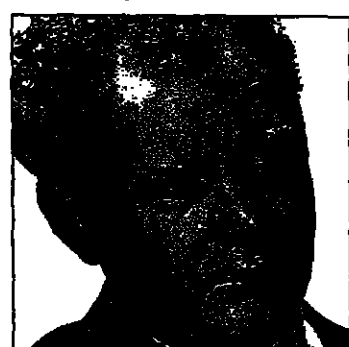
Yagan, who led Aborigine resistance to settlers in the Swan River district near Perth was shot dead in 1833 and his head taken to England later that year. It was presented to the Liverpool Royal Institution and in 1894 was lent to Liverpool City Museum. In 1964, the museum's keeper of ethnology recommended that the head, along with other remains, should be destroyed as they were decomposing and thus made "disagreeable room mates". However, the remains were buried, and, in 1968, the bodies of stillborn children were buried above them.

## Seat fault caused pilot's death

A pilot died because his seat suddenly shot backwards as he tried to land his light aircraft, a report has revealed.

David Dawson, 42, of Bere Regis, Dorset, died instantly from head and neck injuries when his Cessna 172 struck a hillside at Compton Abbas airfield near Shaftesbury, Dorset, on 21 November last year. A report by the Air Accidents Investigation Branch of the Department of Transport says the aircraft was flown from Bournemouth International Airport before attempting to land at Compton Abbas just before 2pm. According to the report: "... the pilot's seat had moved rearwards during the landing roll," leading to loss of control. The report made four safety recommendations to prevent a similar accident.

## Outrage over Sinn Fein MPs' office



Sinn Fein leaders should be required to take the Oath of allegiance to the Queen before being allowed to open an office at Westminster, David Trimble, the Ulster Unionist leader, said yesterday. Mr Trimble said he will be protesting to the Commons authorities about the allocation of an office to Sinn Fein at the Palace of Westminster following the election of Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness (left) as MPs.

The two Sinn Fein leaders are ready to use the House facilities, including an office to be opened by Seán Ó hAnalláin, an alleged IRA supporter, but they are not going to take the oath, or the Oath. Lord Tebbit, whose wife was paralysed in the Grand Hotel bombing in Brighton, said Mr McGuinness, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, should make it clear they were allowing no concessions to terrorists.

Colin Brown

## Tea break costs workers their jobs

Union leaders meet employers this week in a bid to win back the jobs of 50 workers sacked after they took a tea break.

Steel erectors working on the £50m Avonmouth Bridge widening scheme on the M5 near Bristol got their marching orders after claiming they were entitled to down tools for 10 minutes. But the London-based building firm Kvaerner said the steelmen were in breach of their contracts. The two sides are due to meet with the National Joint Council, which represents the construction industry, on Wednesday. Kvaerner said the men took too long to walk from the bridge to their brew-up. Steel erectors have been bussed down from Scotland to take over the sacking men's £6.40-an-hour jobs.

## Asylum-seekers on hunger strike

Asylum-seekers being held at Winson Green Prison in Birmingham are refusing food in protest at conditions, the Prison Service has confirmed. The action began on Wednesday night and is now officially recognised as a hunger strike because 72 hours have passed. Ten men - refusing food but accepting fluids - are said to be angry at being kept in a jail while their applications for refugee status are considered by the Home Office. But the Prison Service denies the men are being locked up for most of the day and denied access to bathing, education and leisure facilities. "We are satisfied the conditions at the jail are acceptable," a spokesman said.

## Pensioners' plea over sex line bill

British Telecom has slashed a couple's telephone bill after they complained about more than £75 of calls to international sex lines which they did not make. Sidney and Joan Durham, who are pensioners, were shocked to receive an itemised bill for £82, mostly made up of sexline calls. But BT confirmed yesterday it had accepted the challenge of the couple from Hartlepool - and reduced their bill to just £5.10p. They are believed to have ended up with the calls on their bill after someone hacked into their line to avoid having to pay.

## people



Star line-up: Mariel Padilla Sánchez, Andie Macdowell and Traci Lind in Cannes yesterday

## Celluloid Spice upstages Hollywood sugar in Cannes

It would be a unique chance to show the Spice Girls as they have never been seen before, film producer Uri Fruchtmann said yesterday.

Given the blanket coverage awarded Britain's five-woman pop sensation, it may be hard to imagine what more we can learn.

But, announcing *Spice - the Movie*, Mr Fruchtmann promised an opportunity to see behind the scenes during one hectic week in the lives of the UK's most famous girl band.

Richard E. Grant, star of *Withnail & I* and *The Player*, is to play their neurotic manager in the film, which will be released in time for Christmas to coincide with the girls' second album - and maximise its commercial impact.

PolyGram Filmed Entertainment, which is making the film, said it would "capture all the crazy situations and wacky people behind the scenes. The film will be full of music, energy and, most of all, all five of the gorgeous and very independent women."

Every ounce of that wacky independence was on display yesterday, as the project was announced at the Cannes film festival.

Although initially told to be quiet by a PolyGram

spokesman before the conference began, they then let rip by ordering the 250 journalists present to perform a Mexican wave and ridiculing members of the press who asked questions.

Gerl said she was "proud to be part of the Brit pack" and admitted the film would "take the mickey" out of the Spice Girls. "It is a parody of ourselves... It is also a celebration of London in the Nineties and you'll see what the Spice Girls are really like and what we really say," she said.

"It is about our inner and outer struggles and we are dedicating it to our fans. Whether you like the Spice Girls or not, it will be very entertaining."

She said she hoped she would get to "have a good snog" with Hollywood heartthrob Brad Pitt, although there was no indication he was on the cast list.

Despite number one hits in 32 countries, the Spice Girls were not, however, on the list of those invited to lunch with Jacques Chirac, the first sitting French president to visit the 50-year-old festival.

Those who were invited included Isabelle Adjani, the actress who is heading the festival jury, and directors Robert Altman, Francis Ford Coppola, Bernardo Bertolucci and David Lynch.

Louise Jury

## Victory jam strikes note of embarrassment

Three leading German politicians accepted a bogus "invitation" to a musical victory party for the new Prime Minister, Tony Blair, that was to take place in London, a German satirical magazine reported yesterday.

The Frankfurt-based *Titanic* magazine said Oskar Lafontaine, chairman of the Social Democrats (SPD), along with SPD leaders Gerhard Schröder and Rudolf Scharping, agreed by telephone to attend the non-existent party.

A *Titanic* reporter, Martin Sonnborn, speaking English, posed as "Mr. Burlington, head of the celebration committee of the Labour Party", the magazine said.

"All three said they would be delighted to attend," *Titanic* said. The SPD even put out a press release last week saying Mr Lafontaine

this statement was withdrawn a day later.

The magazine said all three were asked to bring an instrument in order to take part in "a victory jam session" with Mr Blair, who would play an electric guitar, and the US President, Bill Clinton, who they were told would bring his saxophone.

"I can't play anything," Schröder told the magazine. "I can't even sing." But he added: "I will come gladly, very gladly, I like you guys."

Mr Schröder, premier of the state of Lower Saxony, is a top candidate to challenge Chancellor Helmut Kohl in next year's general elections.

Mr Scharping, whom Mr Kohl defeated in 1994, said he would bring a percussion instrument to play. But he insisted that he be allowed to play in the front row, next to Mr Blair.

Reuters



Oskar Lafontaine: One in the eye

## briefing

## HEALTH

## Children as young as 11 worry about their weight

The lives of schoolchildren are being blighted by worries about their appearance, according to a survey published today. Being fat, spotty or having bad teeth are what young people fear most.

A MORI poll of more than 4,000 children, aged between 11 and 16, found that one in four said they worried about being overweight and the same proportion said they were concerned about the appearance of their skin and teeth.

Twice as many girls as boys worried about being overweight - 45 per cent, compared with 21 per cent. Children who described their families as poor worried more about their weight than those who said their families were rich - 41 per cent, compared with 32 per cent. Worries about appearance increased as children got older. By the time they were aged 15 or 16, 38 per cent expressed concern about being overweight.

The survey was commissioned by the Royal College of Nursing to mark Nurses Day today, the birthday of Florence Nightingale.

Christine Hancock, the RCN general secretary, said: "It is all too easy to forget what it feels like to be young and insecure."

Jeremy Laurence

## ROADS

## Motorists plagued by rubbish

Rubbish is proving a curse for motorists, as Britain's roads are clogged up with more than 2 million pieces of junk at any one time, a study showed yesterday.

Debris includes 312,000 broken car parts and 240,000 dead animals, according to the study, carried out for Autoglass. The company got 500 drivers to keep a "roadwatch" diary for a week, covering a sixth of Britain's road network.

Each driver saw an average of 26 pieces of rubbish. For the country as a whole, this adds up to 768,000 pieces of general rubbish, 576,000 cans and cigarette boxes, 480,000 items of road debris, such as loose tarmac and gravel, 312,000 pieces of car debris, like tyres and exhausts, and 240,000 dead animals.

More than half the drivers (54 per cent) said they were forced to swerve to avoid objects and nearly three quarters (72 per cent) complained there was more rubbish on the roads now than five years ago.

## SOCIETY

## Alcopop lure for under-age drinkers

The number of under-age teenagers drinking alcohol regularly has grown by 15 per cent over the last 10 years - and a significant proportion cite the controversial "alcopops" as their introduction to alcohol, according to a new survey.

In 1996, 65 per cent of boys and 54 per cent of girls between 15 and 16 reported drinking on a weekly basis, compared with 49 and 38 per cent a decade earlier. In one Liverpool hospital last year, 200 children were admitted with alcohol overdoses, according to the Channel 4 programme *Health Alert*, to be shown at 8pm on Thursday.

Similarly, the numbers of children who reported having been drunk on four or more occasions has risen over the last 10 years from 38 to 53 per cent for boys and 24 to 43 per cent for girls.

Glenda Cooper

## WORK

## Firms count cost of stress

Companies are wasting time and money because their executives are having their energy sapped by office politics and increased pressures, a survey has found. A study of 100 senior and middle managers highlighted growing levels of stress, worsened by long hours, infrequent breaks and insomnia.

Two-thirds of those questioned by the Quindoo Centre for stress management admitted to suffering stress-related problems at work, including bullying and office politics. Senior managers were failing to see the danger signs for stress levels among employees.

"It is an established fact that 90 per cent of absenteeism is stress-related, with millions of pounds lost to UK companies as a result."

"Companies don't have time or money to waste on office politics and the stress it spawns - this wastage needs to be tackled urgently if business targets are to be met," said Quindoo Centre spokesman, Mahal Tierney.

Half the managers surveyed said they took more days off sick last year than in 1995.

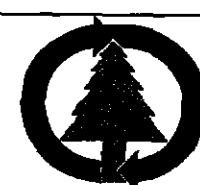
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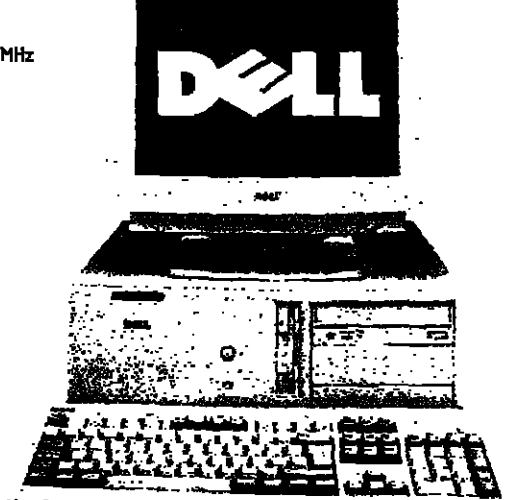
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# Water company to offer free pipe repairs

Nicholas Schoon  
Environment Correspondent

Britain's biggest water company is to offer to repair leaks in its customers' supply pipes free of charge in an attempt to forestall criticism of the high leakage rates from its mains.

With the new government expected to hold a drought summit next week, Thames Water wants to be seen to be taking the issue of water wastage seriously.

In the latest set of official leakage figures from the industry regulator, Ofwat, Thames was stated to lose 38

leakage and is making progress. But so far it has not joined the growing number of companies who offer to repair leaking supply pipes free of charge - although several will only do this if the customer has a water meter fitted at the same time.

Within three weeks, however, Thames will announce that it will repair any leakage in supply pipes, meter or no meter. But it will not offer to repair dripping taps or overflowing cisterns, things which, during the election campaign, Labour said it would insist on companies doing if it came to power.

The likeliest date for the Government's drought summit is 21 May, and it is expected to last half a day. Water companies, the industry's two regulators, consumer and environmental groups are being asked to attend, as well as the press. John Prescott, Secretary of State for the Environment, will open the proceedings and Environment Minister Michael Meacher will wrap them up.

There are fears that, under the gaze of the media, the event itself will be little more than a talking shop and public relations exercise with all the participants merely repeating their existing lines on dealing with the drought.

The last government was reluctant to intervene as water shortages deepened, leaving matters to the two regulators - Ofwat and the Environment Agency. The new set of ministers wants to intervene more, but in the absence of any fresh legislation, it will be a matter of leaning on the companies and the regulators.

The election itself seems, at least superficially, to have broken the drought. Ever since 1 May, there has been abundant rainfall: with only one-third of the month having expired, more than half of May's average rainfall has already fallen in England and Wales, and more is forecast. But while this has put back the threat of hosepipe bans by several weeks, much of the south and east of England is still in drought after two dry years and an exceptionally dry start to this year.

## The dry years

Summer 1995: Yorkshire Water spent £47m trucking in water as almost one-third of supplies leaked from pipes.  
March 1996: Inquiry told Yorkshire Water suggested Bradford be evacuated if reservoirs ran dry.  
June 1996: Row after Yorkshire Water's earnings leapt from £142m to £162.2m.  
July 1996: Thames Water heads leaks league, losing 333 litres for every household.  
July 1996: Government took legal action against South West Water as supplies claimed unfit for consumption.  
February 1997: Water companies warned supplies were about to reach crisis point after driest winter for 250 years.  
April 1997: Tankers on standby outside Chase Community School, north London, where 1,200 pupils were sent home after water dried up.

per cent of the treated water it puts into the mains - a higher proportion than any other company. It blames that mainly on London clay, the shrinkage of which during dry spells causes fractures.

Two-thirds of the leakage comes from its own network of pipes but the remainder is estimated to be lost on the customer's side, which begins as soon as the supply pipe leaves the street and crosses the outside boundary of a property.

Thames, serving more than 7 million people in and outside London, insists that it is doing everything it can to cut mains



Stage presence: The great Italian tenor Luciano Pavarotti walking on to the stage of the Royal Opera House in London yesterday for his first recital there in 18 years. The sell-out performance, which ended in a string of encores, was his last appearance at Covent Garden before the theatre closes in July for redevelopment. Photograph: Nicola Kurtz

# Child labour shame for leisure industry

Louise Jury

Nearly all the premier division football clubs sell sports goods to fans which have been made by child labour in India, according to a report published today.

The charity Christian Aid, working with investigators in India, found children as young as seven routinely stitching footballs for export to Britain. They also found 10-year-old boys in small workshops manufacturing items such as boxing and cricket gloves.

Clare Short, Secretary of State for International Development, said the report, *A Sporting Chance*, made "disturbing reading".

She immediately promised to strengthen the Government's support for the International Labour Organisation's programme on eliminating child labour and to support the efforts of British business to promote ethical standards in commerce.

Martin Cottingham, the report's author, said what was needed was improved adult pay and conditions so that child

labour can be phased out, as has already begun to happen in Pakistan.

He said a consumer boycott or switching suppliers was not the answer. "Lost business could mean lost jobs for adults and could drive vulnerable children into more dangerous and degrading work."

He asked major companies like Mitre, Umbro and Adidas to use their money and muscle to persuade existing suppliers to implement basic minimum labour standards.

Many have already committed themselves to phasing out child labour, but Christian Aid wants tougher action sooner. Researchers visited 13 factories and small workshops, two tanneries and more than 30 other places where footballs were being stitched.

Despite frequent denials that child labour existed, they found widespread evidence of children working, often in hazardous conditions.

Upala Banerjee, one of the researchers, said: "It was very shocking. We could see children sitting in hunched positions

working in dimly lit rooms or tanneries where the whole atmosphere was polluted."

"We even saw a lot of rugby balls being stitched. The irony is that in India we don't play rugby."

One 11-year-old girl, Sonia, was found making a Manchester United football bearing a picture of Eric Cantona for an average wage of 24 pence a day.

The report said: "If these products were counterfeits they were very good ones - identical in every detail to those that sell in the club's official souvenir shop for £9.99."

Families in her village work mainly for Mayor and Co, India's biggest sports-goods exporter, and a key supplier for Mitre, Britain's leading football maker and official supplier to all premier club except Chelsea and Manchester United.

A 12-year-old boy, Pintu, was said to have worked for two years as unpaid assistant to help his father tan the leather

used for a variety of sporting goods. Between them they worked 17 hours a day for an effective pay rate of 8p an hour.

The report said that the leather was supplied to some of India's biggest manufacturers, including FC Sondhi who manufacture cricket balls for Alfred Reader - the official supplier for England test matches.

Britain is the single biggest export market for India's sports-goods industry.

A Mitre spokeswoman said

they disputed some details but welcomed the report for its "balanced approach". They were happy to work with Christian Aid and other bodies, including a new committee in India, to tackle the problem.

A Manchester United spokeswoman said: "At the moment, we haven't got a statement to make." But Christian Aid said the club had made checks and obtained an undertaking from its supplier that child labour was not being used.

# Calendar filling fast as card firms tap new vein of cash

Glenda Cooper  
Consumer Affairs Correspondent

It's 12 May - does that ring a bell? It doesn't? How could you forget that today is Happy Nurses' Day?

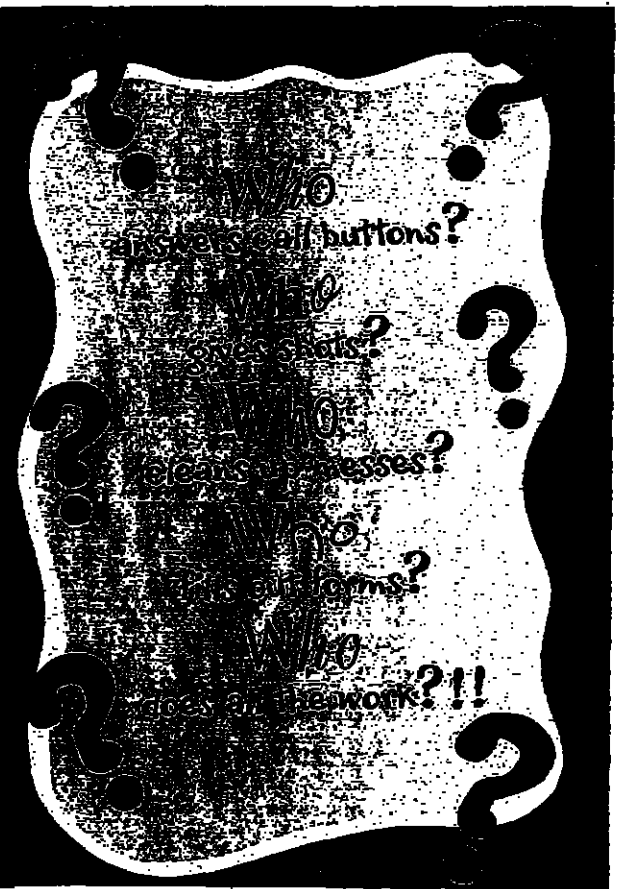
In that case 23 April (Secretaries' Day) or 15 October (Bosses' Day) probably means nothing either. If Mother's and Father's Days weren't enough, there is now a proliferation of greetings cards for almost any day of the year to show appreciation for those around you - or to induce guilt if you forget.

There are now greeting cards for around 21 special days of the year, encompassing saints' days, and religious festivals as well as the more unusual.

Today is Nurses' Day - so chosen because it is the birthday of Florence Nightingale, the pioneer of modern nursing. While the Royal College of Nursing is putting out surveys to gauge reaction to the idea, Clinton Cards have as many as six different designs of cards to mark the occasion.

A spokeswoman for the RCN said: "We've encouraged the Nurses' Day cards and we welcome the fact that it is getting bigger and bigger across the world... It should be a huge celebration of the work of nurses, a chance to recognise and value them."

John Condon, purchasing director for Clinton Cards, said the company had sold 10,000 of these cards last year and was hoping to shift as many as 15,000 this year - small beer, however, when compared to occasions like Valentine's Day



Mark of appreciation: One of the selection of cards available to celebrate the recently introduced Nurses' Day

when sales are in the millions. "People think a lot of nurses, they do so much for so little and this is a way of saying thank you," said Mr Condon. "I think it's a combination of families who have got people with nurses in and those who have been

in hospital who want to say thank you to those who have looked after them."

Like Nurses' Day, most of the ideas for new cards originate from America - although Age Concern has trademarked Grandparents' Day which falls

on 27 September this year. "We did it to raise awareness that grandparents are important members of society," said a spokeswoman for the charity.

"We trademarked it so that we could get donations from the cards sold, although that hasn't worked so well in the last couple of years."

Religious festivals such as the Jewish Hanukkah and Passover, the Muslim Eid-al-Fitr (end of Ramadan) and Eid-al-Adha (to celebrate Haj) - a festival that takes place in Mecca - and the Hindu Diwali (festival of lights) have been taken up by mainstream card companies.

Other recent innovations include patron saints' day cards - for St Andrew, St Patrick, St George and St David. "St George's Day has come on in leaps and bounds," said Mr Condon. "This is the third year and we have had lots of correspondence thanking us for introducing it."

For the consummate crawler, Bosses' Day has been a godsend. Last year saw 1,500 fawning employees buying cards for their employers - although Mr Condon said that the favoured tone appeared to be "mickety taking and joshing" rather than serious. Almost half of Britain's casualty nurses have been assaulted at work and almost all of them, 96%, have suffered verbal abuse. The study by ICM for the BBC's *Here and Now* programme and *Nursing Times* also showed that one in three of 500 nurses interviewed felt unsafe at work and most believed not enough was being done to protect them.

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BT

news

# Private smear test criticised by doctors

Jeremy Laurance  
Health Editor

A cervical smear test sold to women with the claim that it is more accurate than that used by the National Health Service has been criticised by doctors and NHS managers who say it is undermining the national screening service.

The computerised test, called Papnet, is being marketed in Britain and across Europe by its United States manufacturer Neuromedical Systems which says its greater accuracy brings "peace of mind". In the United Kingdom, women are being asked to pay a £100 registration fee and £45 for each test and GPs are being offered a £10 fee for each smear they take.

Sales teams are canvassing women in senior company positions offering them the test and signing up GPs prepared to provide it in Scotland, Nottingham, Birmingham, Bournemouth, Hampshire, Avon and Bromley, south London. Women are reminded that the NHS test is sometimes inaccurate, although direct reference to recent screening blunders involving the recall of thousands of women is officially discouraged. More than

1,000 of the tests are being sold each month, the company claims.

In addition to the normal manual check of the smear for abnormal cells, the test involves a computerised screening done by a laboratory in Amsterdam.

Women are being recruited for the test by a marketing company set up to promote it called the Independent Women's Protection Association. GPs are being approached by a separate company called Cytotest.

In Bromley, the health authority is warning all GP practices in the area that women should not use the test as a replacement for the NHS service. Dr Angela Bhan, deputy director of public health, said: "I have had calls from GPs who were unhappy about calling in women for smears that were outside the NHS and they did not feel comfortable about charging for them. I was concerned that women would see it as an alternative to the NHS test. Any screening programme has to be a national programme and it could undermine that."

Julietta Patrick, national co-ordinator of the NHS cervical screening programme, said she was not against automated screening if it could be proved to

be of benefit. "What I am uncomfortable with is the way it is being marketed. It will totally upset our programme because we will lose continuity of screening."

She said cases of invasive cancer had fallen from 16 per 100,000 smears to 11.2 in the last decade, beating the target set under the Health of the Nation strategy of 12.8 by 2000. She was worried that the new test could pick up extra transient abnormalities, causing anxiety.

The Papnet test is claimed to provide 30 per cent greater sensitivity in picking up abnormal cells than traditional examination by microscope.

Wayne Taylor, UK manager of Neuromedical Systems, said: "We are very supportive of the NHS screening programme and we are not trying to undermine it. But governments cannot afford to offer this test. We feel women should have the choice of whether to have the NHS test alone or the NHS test plus Papnet. It is a seatbelt and airbag scenario. We are trying not to market it aggressively but we obviously have to justify ourselves to our shareholders. For the price of a hair-do or a pair of shoes women can have peace of mind."

## Crime crackdown to make streets safer for students



Soft target: French students in Brighton where Operation Chaffinch has reduced the number of 'incidents' by 40 per cent Photograph: Andrew Hasson

## Resorts to protect their foreign assets

Michael Streeter

As seaside resorts brace themselves for the annual influx of hundreds of thousands of foreign students, police and local authorities are finalising plans to stop the visitors being victimised by locals.

"Student bashing" has become a popular-pastime for a small minority of youths, who prey on youngsters often unable to speak much English and who are unlikely to stay as potential witnesses in any court cases - even if they report the crime.

But with the growing language-school business worth tens of millions of pounds to local economies, a string of initiatives has been developed among south coast towns desperate to ensure that foreign students are not deterred by fear of violence or theft.

In Southampton, where two local gangs had been picking on students, a scheme called Student Watch has helped to reduce dramatically the number of incidents.

The programme, involving bus companies, retailers, the local council, language schools and police, includes establishing "safe havens" for students who may fear attack. These havens are local shops which put up stickers showing they are prepared to help students in trouble. The police are also arranging extra patrols at night at potential flashpoints. They estimate that the number of inci-

dents has halved since the scheme was launched last year.

Student Watch chairperson Patricia Thompson said: "It is a problem escalating throughout Europe, and Southampton is no worse than anywhere else in the South Coast - probably better. But it was something that needed to be addressed and it was."

In Brighton, which attracts about 30,000 foreign students a year, Operation Chaffinch is credited with cutting the number of incidents by around 40 per cent. A police spokeswoman said: "A lot of the students are quite young, and in groups and very apparent. Some of the local youths were targeting them because they had ready money and are less likely to report the crime."

After last year's joint launch with the local authority - building on existing schemes - detectives visit language schools and students to brief them on likely pitfalls. Students and their host families are encouraged to report all incidents so police can establish patterns. The police spokeswoman said the cameras help in prosecutions when students went back to their own countries. "In one case we never found the victim but there was still a prosecution."

Out of 15,000 foreign stu-

dents who visit Eastbourne each year, there are some 200 attacks. The local council is currently producing cartoon-style leaflets and maps to brief students on how to steer clear of trouble. A spokesman said: "It's a problem we recognise, but compared with Brighton it's nowhere near as bad."

In Plymouth, visited by around 6,000 students, police and local language schools have just produced a leaflet in different languages - English, Italian, French, Spanish and German - based on the advice of a character called "PC Bob".

One of the first towns to tackle the problem was Hastings, where Operation Host has helped reduce the number of attacks on the 30,000 to 40,000 annual student visitors to just 89 recorded cases last year, though the number of street robberies rose. The town's scheme this year will include for the first time informal patrols by student leaders wearing Student Watch sweatshirts.

Patrick Amos, country production manager for EF Education, one of the largest language schools, said he was "very happy" with the new co-operation emerging between authorities and language schools especially in towns such as Brighton, Hastings and Torquay. This included schools such as his own paying towards CCTV. "There are two things at issue, to ensure students are safe, and that publicity is not negative in the towns."



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### Full-time job. Part-time childhood.

Sangli is only nine but already he talks about his childhood in the past tense. It ended the day he started work, at just eight years old. Since then, he will tell you, life is a slog every day of the week. The seven mile walk to find a good patch, the nine hours kneeling in the dust mending shoes, the miserable 30p or so earned.

There is no play. The word doesn't enter his vocabulary. And no education, unless you include the kind you get on the streets, like how to look after yourself when a customer gets rough.

Why does he do it? Because his parents are so poor that they need, really need, his 30p a day to help pay for food and clothes.

If Sangli were the only child in the world working his childhood away it would be one too many. As it is he is one of some 55 million in India alone. Christian Aid works to combat child labour by campaigning for decent adult wages and improving families' living standards so that parents can afford to take their kids off the street.

So please give all you can to help us in Christian Aid Week. Call us with a donation right now. You'll be giving children a chance to be children.

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# Fields of dreams we don't want to share

More people than ever are visiting the country, but they want to keep it to themselves

John Harvey

The dream of the rural good life is alive and well. Unfortunately it is not a dream we wish to share. On the contrary, "Not in my back yard", or "Nimby" attitudes are widespread, according to a report published this week by the Countryside Commission.

The nationwide survey, canvassing more than 1,000 people, reveals that twice as many people would like to live in the countryside as do at the moment, implying a need to build many more new homes. Yet these same people do not want more housebuilding to put pressure on what they perceive as their countryside. More than half of those surveyed - 58 per cent - say changes to the countryside surrounding their homes would concern them most.

The survey, backed up by six discussion sessions with interested groups, found people are equally two-faced about traffic on rural roads. Most worry about other people's cars blocking country roads, yet they don't want to leave their own cars at home and use public transport to travel to beauty spots. For example, 91 per cent of visitors to National Parks arrive by car, yet 70 per cent of those surveyed said people driving their cars are damaging the countryside.

More people than ever visit the countryside and expect to find modern facilities when they arrive, yet the survey found 72 per cent worry that leisure development could ruin their favourite views.

The overwhelming majority - 91 per cent - agree that society has a moral duty to protect the countryside for the future, and 89 per cent say the countryside should be protected at all costs. Some 72 per cent accept they will have to pay more to protect the countryside, and 71 per cent feel that government efforts to do so should be stepped up.



Country strife: Looking over fields towards Burford, in the Cotswolds, one of the idyllic country views we like to enjoy but do not want to share

Photograph: Tom Pilsten

Most people still think there should be greater public access to the countryside, notwithstanding the fact that 70 per cent acknowledge that farmers - often perceived as obstructing that access - keep the landscape attractive.

"These personal contradic-

tions mean that what the general public values and wants from the countryside can threaten the very things they want protected," said Richard Simmonds, chairman of the Countryside Commission.

John Gummer, former environment secretary, argued that

up to 60 per cent of the four million homes needed by 2016 could be built on derelict or "brown field" sites in urban areas. The Council for Rural England backed Mr Gummer on this. But Tony Burton, CPRE's assistant director, says he is unsure

what Labour will do. "We think they could argue that we are being Nimby by wanting most of the houses taken out of the countryside and built in the cities," Mr Burton said.

In many ways, the survey bears out the conflict at the heart of countryside policy.

Before the election, Labour said it would legislate to introduce a right to roam in open country. Kate Ashbrook, chairman of the Ramblers' Association, says she still expects the Government to issue a consultation paper on the matter as soon as possible. Landowners,

however, led by the Country Landowners Association - are bound to object, saying they prefer "managed" access.

In other words, landowners want to tell walkers precisely where they can go in the landowners' backyards, rather than allowing them to roam.

## Keeping the modern world at bay

**Nigel Hawthorne**, actor (right), played Sir Humphrey Appleby in *Yes Minister*; bought a Grade II listed farmhouse in 1992. He was at the forefront of a local group determined to prevent the building of a motorway service station - 250 yards from his house.



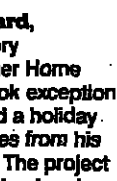
**Bel Mooney**, writer (right), wanted to stop a planned bypass near her home in Bath in 1994, and spent two weeks camping in a Mongolian yurt. Refused to let protesters stay on her land because it was tied up with organic cattle belonging to her husband Jonathan Dimbleby.



**Princess Anne**, the Princess Royal (right), objected to plans for 73 homes on the site of a derelict 14th-century mill backing on to her estate, Gatcombe Park. It would be a security risk, she said.



**Michael Howard**, contender for Tory leadership, former Home Secretary; he took exception to a plan to build a holiday village a few miles from his £500,000 home. The project waits on a planning inquiry.



**Jilly Cooper**, prolific author (right); she strongly opposed a plan to build 83 new houses, uncomfortably close to her own in Bisley, Gloucestershire.



Sam Coates

CEO AND FOUNDER  
**amazon.com**  
The world's largest online bookstore.

Business on the Internet... all potential, no performance, right? With a company that's growing at a rate of 5,000% per year, Jeff Bezos couldn't disagree more. He's CEO and founder of Amazon.com, the world's largest and most prosperous on-line bookstore.

"The Internet can help you gain or lose a lot of customers very, quickly" says Jeff. So he hooked up with DIGITAL. "It's critical to work with a computer company that has experience helping

## the fast lane or the highway to hell.

"The Internet can mean people do business on the net," he says. "It's for your business also nice that DIGITAL has It all depends on who you hook up with." the world's widest range of high performance servers." To support its rapid growth, Amazon.com has upgraded its DIGITAL AlphaServer™ 2000 series to two DIGITAL AlphaServer 8400s, ideal for high growth corporations. "We're using AlphaServer systems to run our key on-line electronic commerce systems as well as our entire range of back office and financial applications," Bezos says. The fact is, DIGITAL has lots of ways to help

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Politics

# Viddecombe strikes blow against Howard in leadership battle



Colin Brown  
Chief Political Correspondent

Michael Howard's campaign for the leadership of the Tory Party suffered a serious blow last night from Ann Widdecombe, his former prisons minister, who claimed the former home secretary misled the House of Commons over the sacking of the prisons director, Derek Lewis.

She has warned colleagues there is "something of the night" about Mr Howard's personality. It will increase the impression of a ruthless streak in him following the disclosures that he tried to stop William Hague, former secretary of state for Wales, running against him, in a campaign deal which broke down.

Ms Widdecombe, a double Tory who is taken seriously by colleagues, privately describes Mr Howard as "dangerous stuff", according to friends, who said she was determined to stop Mr Howard becoming leader of the party by detailing her objections to him in a letter to John Major, as the party's caretaker leader.

Ms Widdecombe is a supporter of a rightwing rival, Peter Lilley. She was urged by Mr Lilley's team not to carry out her threat because they feared it would rebound on Mr Lilley.

"This has been a long time coming. Basically she hates him and they didn't have a harmonious relationship at the Home Office. She was determined to set out his disadvantages as she sees it. She says he misled the Commons. That is what she feels precisely occurred. When I heard about this I was quite concerned. Those who support Peter did urge her not to do so, but she has written this letter despite being for Peter Lilley, not because of it," one of Mr Lilley's friends said.

Ms Widdecombe said last night: "I have no comment at this time."

Mr Howard admitted he fell out with Ms Widdecombe over the sacking of Mr Lewis but said it had been fully scrutinised by Parliament. "Ann and I disagreed about a very important decision, the dismissal of Derek Lewis as head of the Prison Service," he said. "I had to overrule her because there was an independent report which made very serious

criticisms of the Prison Service management from top to bottom.

"Ann felt very strongly about that. We disagreed. I am convinced the decision we made was the right one and few decisions have been subject to more parliamentary scrutiny, including a debate on the floor of the House of Commons, than that one," Mr Howard said on BBC's *Breakfast with Frost* programme yesterday.

Mr Hague's bandwagon gathered momentum in the country, with increasing demands for more say for the grassroots of the party in the choice of a leader. His supporters believe the 164 Tory MPs who must select the new leader will be expected to reflect the wishes of their constituency parties.

Mr Hague will be stepping up his campaign by visiting Scotland and Wales, in addition to other tours of the country. Mr Howard sought to steal the initiative by calling for a referendum on the outcome of the inter-governmental conference in Amsterdam next June, but Mr Hague matched his call.

Lord Tebbit, a leading Euro-sceptic, came out in support of John Redwood in the *Sunday Times* newspaper, because "He was not on the bridge when the captain of the ship rammed it on to the rocks."

Kenneth Clarke last week tried to persuade Stephen Dorrell to drop out of the race in return for the promise of a senior position in his shadow cabinet if Mr Clarke won, as disclosed in *The Independent*. The former chancellor said the role of deputy leader would go a Euro-sceptic from the right. Their private meeting ended with Mr Dorrell offering Mr Clarke the chance to be his number two, an offer Mr Clarke laughed off.

Mr Clarke is still expected to lead the field on the first ballot, but will fall by the wayside in later rounds. His supporters' votes are likely to switch to Mr Hague, 36, who is staking his campaign on a pledge for a "fresh start". If Mr Hague wins, he could make Mr Howard his shadow chancellor to give the Opposition more bite against the Chancellor Gordon Brown's first Budget.



Widdecombe: Wrote to Major detailing objections to Howard

## Ministers order new research into Gulf War illness

Kim Sengupta

Sufferers of Gulf War syndrome will receive a major boost today when George Robertson, Secretary of State for Defence, announces a new action plan to tackle the problem.

In what constitutes an u-turn by the Ministry of Defence under its new Labour masters, it has been decided that "substantial new resources" will be invested into extra research to discover what lies behind the illness of thousands of British and American servicemen.

And Mr Robertson is to declare that, unlike under the previous administration, all research and findings will be carried out in a totally open and accountable way.

As a first step, Gulf War veterans' representatives will be invited to the MoD to meet ministers and senior officials to discuss the problem. They will also be consulted over future actions taken on the matter.

A prime aim of the new research will be to examine possible side-effects caused by the vaccinations and drugs given to the servicemen as protection against Iraqi chemical and biological weapons during the 1991 war. It will be carried out in addition to research on exposure to organophosphate pesticides and chemical weapons.

Additional resources will also be devoted to clearing up a backlog of veterans still awaiting medical examination. Around a thousand have been examined by the MoD's medical team so far.

The resultant findings will be used to compare the health of Gulf War veterans with military personnel who did not serve in the Kuwait theatre. Former and serving troops are being enticed to fill in complex questionnaires with the offer of putting their names into a £1,000 draw.

The new Labour ministers, according to informed sources, will also be demanding an explanation as to how previous ministers, including former Armed Forces Minister Nicholas Soames, were misled by civil servants over widespread use of pesticides during the Gulf conflict. They will also re-examine the actions taken by senior officers and civil servants before, during, and immediately after the war.

The Armed Forces Minister, John Reid, will play a leading role in the new drive. A source said: "There is widespread public disquiet over the matter, and the Labour government is determined to devote whatever is necessary to get to the bottom of this." However, there were no plans at this stage to offer compensation payments.

Larry Cammock, a spokesman for the Gulf War Veterans' Association, said: "This is very welcome news. It is great that we are at last going to get some input and some sense. It is appalling that it has taken this long. We have lost a lot of lads waiting for the MoD to take this seriously."

## Free vote granted on gun ban

A free vote on all hand guns is in prospect from Wednesday when a Bill to extend prohibition from larger weapons to .32 and below is expected to be included in the Queen's Speech to Parliament.

Writes Patricia Wynn Davies. The plans for a total ban were welcomed by a delighted anti-gun lobby, but shooters' groups warned that the move would see the virtual elimination of shooting as a sport in Britain.

The Government will allow MPs a free vote on widening the existing ban on larger-calibre guns, introduced in the last Parliament in the Firearms Act.

But its massive majority means

that the outlawing of all weapons is effectively a foregone conclusion.

Tony Blair is understood to have insisted on the Bill's inclusion in the current parliamentary session, despite a heavy programme of core measures, in the wake of the Dunblane massacre in which 16 children and their teacher were shot and killed by Thomas Hamilton.

Anne Pearson, the anti-gun campaigner, said a Gun Control Network Survey had showed that before the election 97 per cent of prospective Labour candidates were in favour of an outright ban.

But Michael Yardley, of the Sportsmen's Association, said that the move would be vastly expensive

while scapegoating tens of thousands of innocent sportsmen and women for the atrocities of one man.

"The sport of shooting has already been destroyed. An extension will wipe out our Olympic pistol shooting team at the Sydney Olympics," Mr Yardley said.

He added that the Government could be left with a £500m bill for de-commissioning weapons.

Pro-shooting campaigners warned that significant numbers of the several hundred shooting clubs in Britain would struggle to stay open in the face of the costs of complying with strict government proposals for the storage and security of small-calibre weapons.

## Abbott set to lead Treasury MPs

The Labour left-winger Diane Abbott could become the next chair of the Treasury Select Committee. If appointed, the Cambridge graduate and Labour NEC member would be the first woman and first black or Asian person to hold the post, writes Kim Sengupta.

In the wake of Gordon Brown's unshackling of the Bank of England, Ms Abbott's name is being increasingly mentioned for the prestigious post by people on both the left and centre-right of the party.

The theory is that the granting of independence to the Bank would have to be balanced by a Treasury committee showing much more teeth and one that keeps a sharp eye

on the Governor, Eddie George.

One senior Labour source said: "Diane has been on the committee for seven years and in that time built up quite a formidable expertise. She should really have been moved on to the Shadow Treasury team, others with less experience have moved there. The feeling is that she deserves the committee chair, this will channel her natural aggression in a constructive way."

"Brian [Sedgmore] is also very good and impressive. He is the other natural choice as the chair. But he has not been as present at the committee as often as Diane, and anyway there is likely to be another important role for him elsewhere."

Ms Abbott said yesterday: "Obviously, if given the opportunity, I would welcome the job. I worked closely with the Conservative members of the committee and got on well together."

The Tory election meltdown has resulted in the departure of all but two Tory members of the Treasury committee, including the chair, Barry Legg. In any event, Labour would now provide the majority of members and fill the chair.

Among the remaining members are the Tory MP Quentin Davies, the acerbic inquisitor of David Willetts, and Labour's Brian Sedgmore, who is also on the left of the party and a possible rival to Ms Abbott.

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# Blunkett wins powers to close failing schools

Judith Judd  
Education Editor

The Secretary of State for Education will be given new powers to close failing schools in an education Bill to be included in this week's Queen's Speech.

At present local authorities have the responsibility for closing bad schools; the Government cannot tell them to take action. David Blunkett, the new Secretary of State for Education, believes that the Government's policy of closing the worst schools and giving them a fresh start with a new head and some new teachers is essential to his drive to raise standards. He is expected either to take powers to intervene directly to close a school, in consultation with a local authority, or to give himself the power to ensure that local authorities take action. Under existing legislation, the Government can send hit-squads of experts into schools which fail to produce satisfactory plans for improvement. The squad has to decide whether the school can be turned round or should close. In practice, only one hit-squad has been appointed. Ministers



Byers: Spelt out concern over failing schools

are this week expected to make clear their belief that a number of failing schools should be closed and given a "fresh start" unless their progress improves rapidly.

Stephen Byers, the school standards minister, yesterday spelt out the Government's concern after studying the history of 281 schools judged by inspectors to be failing. He believes that a number of these

are not making enough progress. The schools are likely to be named within a fortnight. Mr Byers said: "I am shocked that the previous government had a policy of delaying for up to two years and still not taking action when failing schools were making no significant progress." Until the new measures are on the statute books, ministers will have to rely mainly on voluntary means for dealing with failing schools, though they have not ruled out using hit-squads. Mr Byers said: "Local education authorities have to recognise that they have a responsibility in this area and we will be looking to them to discharge their obligations. They should not be tolerating failing schools." Most schools judged to be failing or in need of "special measures" are eventually given a clean bill of health.

However, the Government wants to speed up the closure of the worst schools. It wants local authorities to close schools which show no signs of improvement and to open them with a new head and some new teachers and governors. One council, Hammersmith and Fulham, has already closed a school, renamed it the Phoenix and reopened it with a new head and some new teachers.

A report on failing schools was among Mr Byers's first requests on his arrival at the Department for Education last week. Such schools are monitored regularly by inspectors to see how much progress they are making.

The Government is expected to put in place a number of strategies to turn round failing schools. Heads of good schools will be asked to take over their less successful neighbours.

That has already happened in Calderdale, where Peter Clark temporarily took over the Ridings School after discipline broke down.

Ministers have also promised faster procedures to remove poor teachers.

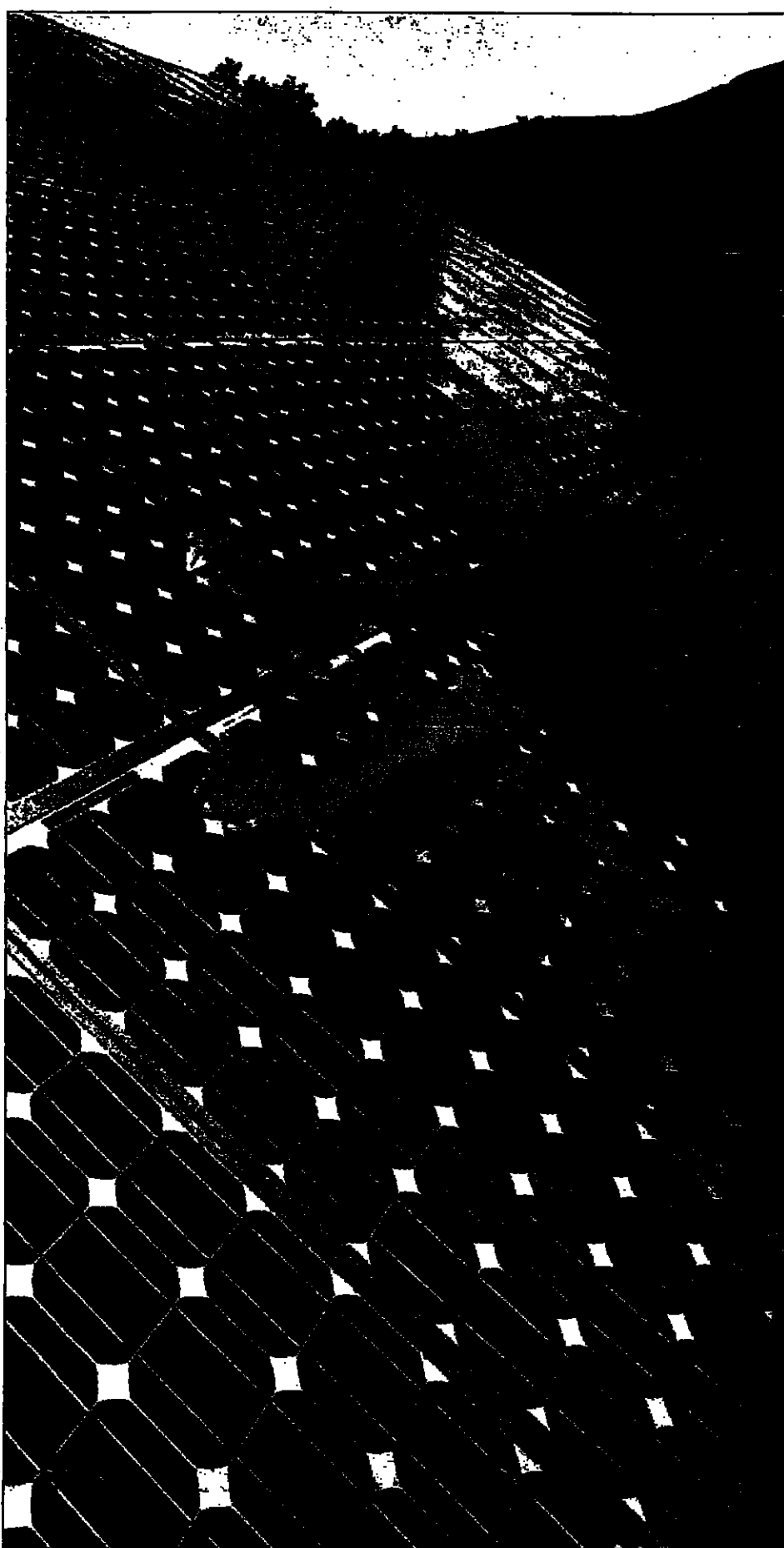
## DAILY POEM

### Cologne

By Samuel Taylor Coleridge

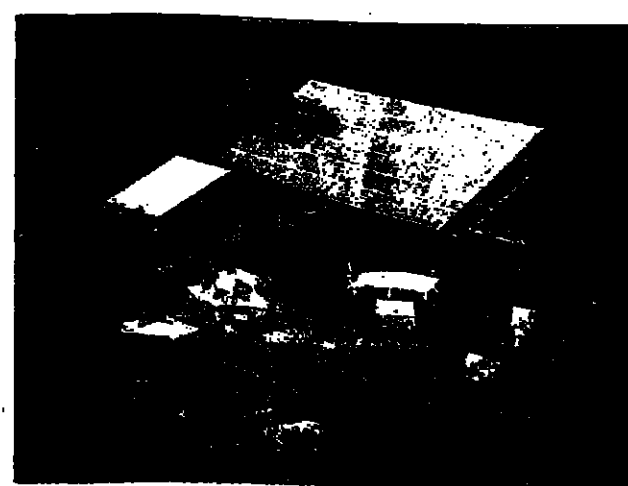
In Köhl, a town of monks and bones,  
And pavements fang'd with murderous stones,  
And rags, and hags, and hideous wenches;  
I counted two and seventy stenchers,  
All well defined, and several stinks!  
Ye Nymphs that reign o'er sewers and sinks,  
The river Rhine, it is well known,  
Doth wash your city of Cologne;  
But tell me, Nymphs! what power divine  
Shall henceforth wash the river Rhine?

The poems printed this week come from the new Penguin Classics edition of Coleridge's *Complete Poems*, edited by William Keach (£11). This contribution to Anglo-German understanding was written in 1828, during Coleridge's tour of the Rhineland with William Wordsworth.



Up on the roof: Builder Chris Ford putting the final touches to the new solar roof at the Centre for Alternative Technology (above right)

Photograph: Tegwyn Roberts



## 'Good life' centre has a sunny future

Nicholas Schoon  
Environment Correspondent

When Britain's pioneering "good life" centre roofed its main office building it installed a power station at the same time. This weekend the Centre for Alternative Technology, a mecca for environmentalists on the southern edge of Snowdonia, formally opened the country's largest photovoltaic roof.

The array of electricity-generating cells covering more than 100 square metres should allow the centre, at Machynlleth in Powys, to finally end any dependence on fossil fuels and become totally reliant on renewable resources.

It had been getting 10 per cent of its electricity from a diesel generator which also supplied heat, with nearly all of the remainder coming from a wind turbine and hydroelectricity. With the advent of the solar roof, sunshine should now provide more than one-third of the centre's electricity through the year.

Founded more than 20 years ago, it covers a seven-acre site, has 14 permanent residents and is visited by 90,000 residents each year who come to learn about green technologies and lifestyles.

The cost of photovoltaic

cells is falling, but they are still uneconomic compared with conventional electricity supplies. However, if they are installed at the same time as a roof is constructed or renewed – as one integrated whole – that makes the proposition much more attractive. The cells take the place of tiles.

Paul Trimby, the centre's solar design consultant, said Britain had only six photovoltaic roofs compared to more than 1,000 in Germany.

"As the costs become comparable with conventional building cladding and roofing materials, solar power will allow buildings to generate their own power," he said.

"They will sell it to the national grid when they have a surplus and buy electricity back when they have a deficit."

The system used at Machynlleth costs £80,000, and was funded with help from the Department of Trade and Industry and a European Union grant aimed at advancing renewable energy technologies.

The roof will be carefully monitored for several years, to see whether it generates as much power as it should – the peak output is 13 kilowatts – while performing the more conventional task of keeping out the rain.

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international

# Canada reels over Quebec revelation

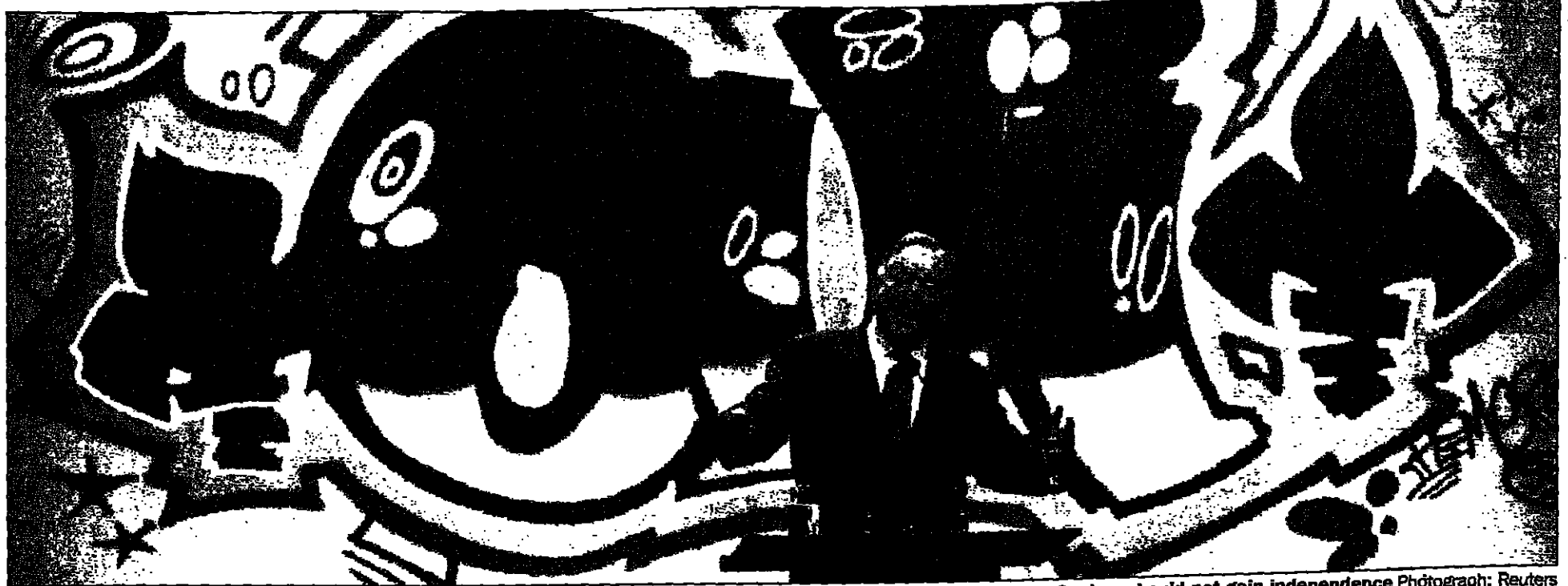
Montreal — "Merci Dieu pour Monsieur Parizeau," the Ottawa journalist muttered in an awful French accent. Voicing gratitude towards the former leader of the Parti Quebecois has been quite the theme here in recent days. But not for his old comrades in the Quebec sovereigntist movement. They are cursing him.

Only the most deeply buried marmot in Canada's remotest reaches can have missed the brouhaha caused by Jacques Parizeau with leaks last week from his book on sovereignty,

to be published today. In it, he appears to suggest that in 1995, when Quebec came within a few thousand votes of approving independence, he was plotting an instant unilateral declaration of independence (UDI).

Never mind that the author says the excerpts were misconstrued; his protestations have been unconvincing. All over again, Quebec is torturing itself about its fate, and the rest of Canada, bewildered and not a little irritated, finds itself once more dragged into the mire.

All this while Canada is in the



All in favour: Jacques Parizeau giving a speech in 1995 at the time of the referendum which decided, but only just, that Quebec should not gain independence. Photograph: Reuters

A new book has rewritten the agenda for the election campaign, reports **David Usborne**

midst of an election campaign — voting has been set by Jean Chretien, the Prime Minister, for 2 June — that was meant to be about everything but the status of Quebec. That was indeed the case for the first ten days.

Jobs, healthcare and taxes were the issues — and the campaign was threatening to shatter even Canada's boredom barometer.

Instead, it is suddenly jammed with intrigue and unexpected volatility. The suggestion of a

UDI plot has caused such a flap because, in presenting the referendum question to Quebecers in 1995, Mr Parizeau and his party partners pledged to spend many months, even a year, negotiating some kind of friendly

partnership with Canada before finally casting off from the wharf. Or so everybody thought. Now, hindsight is spotlighting other events that seem to stand up Mr Parizeau's "Great Game". Days before the October vote,

for instance, the defence spokesman of the sovereigntist Bloc Quebecois sent letters to Quebec-born soldiers in the Canadian armed forces urging them to join a Quebec army once independence was declared.

It was hours before the vote, moreover, that Quebec's deputy premier, Bernard Landry, wrote to foreign ambassadors in Ottawa suggesting that their governments get ready to deal with an independent Quebec. Huge financial manoeuvres were afoot to support the Canadian dollar.

More urgently, the Parizeau affair could have far-reaching consequences. It dropped like a bomb at a time when the Bloc Quebecois, the official opposition in Ottawa that has the separation of Quebec as its sole aim, was already showing signs of vulnerability. If the Bloc loses ground on 2 June, the confidence of the sovereigntist movement could be severely sapped. A good showing, however, would probably speed the advent of another Quebec referendum in the next two years.

Partly, the Bloc is suffering because the man who led it to such success the last time, in 1993, Lucien Bouchard, has taken his skill and charisma back to Quebec City. The current Bloc leader, Gilles Duceppe, does not approach Mr Bouchard for popular appeal.

And then along came the UDI controversy. It has triggered an avalanche of comments such as this from Jean-Paul Murray, a francophone voter from Hull, just across the border from Ontario in Quebec, outside Ottawa. "It just

shows you that you can never, ever believe any word that the sovereigntists tell you. In 1995, Parizeau and Bouchard lied to Quebecers, they tricked Quebecers, they duped Quebecers".

Mr Murray spat out his words after being barred from a Duceppe press conference in Hull's Maison du Citoyen. A committed federalist, he would never have voted for the Bloc, anyway. The danger for Mr Duceppe, however, is that he will lose the so-called "soft nationalists", those who may have voted for independence for Quebec in 1995 but who are still somewhat afraid of it.

Polls released this weekend showed early signs of damage. An Angus-Reid poll for CTV showed Bloc support slipping fast in Quebec to a level of 36 per cent amongst decided Quebec voters — a full 13 points beneath what it achieved in 1993. The poll had Mr Chretien's ruling Liberal Party edging past the Bloc for the first time in very many months with 38 per cent.

The affair is also good news for Mr Chretien in one very critical respect. In spite of great political risks the Prime Minister concluded after the close shave of 1995 to forge a so-called Plan B for Quebec, one that actually dealt with the possibility of an eventual "Yes" win. Specifically, he asked the Supreme Court of Canada to rule on the legality of any UDI by a single province. Suddenly, it looks like a prescient move, indeed. The ruling is expected later this year.

Today, meanwhile, is an important day. Mr Parizeau will be holding a press conference to launch his book and expound on its contents. Oh, and tonight the party leaders have their live television debate.

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## significant shorts

### Iranian quake death-toll rises to 2,400

The death-toll from the Iranian earthquake rose to nearly 2,400 as rescue teams dug through thousands of flattened houses. The number of injured was put at 6,000, the official Iran news agency said in a report from Mashhad, capital of quake-stricken Khorasan province bordering Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Some 2,000 of the dead were from villages around Qaen, and 394 from the city of Birjand. **Reuters — Qaen**

### Israeli threat over murder

Israel threatened to act against the Palestinian Authority if it proved to be behind the murder of an east Jerusalem Arab estate agent suspected of selling land to Jews. Moshe Fogel, a government spokesman, said: "Our police will take action against anyone threatening the death penalty in areas under our control." The body of Farid Bashiri, 70, was found near Ramallah; he had been bound, gagged and clubbed to death. **Eric Silver — Jerusalem**

### Budget advice for Italy

The European Commission will send Italy a letter this week on how to reduce its budget deficit, amid reports that state spending is set to overshoot further than expected in 1998. *La Repubblica* said nine other European Union countries would receive similar advice from the Commission, but added: "The warning issued to Italy is the most severe." The newspaper headlined its front-page report: "Ultimatum to Italy." **Reuters — Rome**

### Holy war set to rage on

Osama bin Laden, identified by the US State Department as a major world sponsor of Islamic extremism, has vowed to continue waging a "holy war" against US troops in Saudi Arabia. In a CNN interview the dissident Saudi Arabian millionaire declared that the US must pay for its support of Israel. **Reuters — New York**

### Plea over cloning humans

The World Medical Association urged doctors and researchers voluntarily to refrain from attempts to clone humans, at the close of a meeting of its executive council in Ferney-Voltaire, France. **Reuters — Paris**

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## A black and white photograph of a man in a suit and tie, holding a large stack of Euro banknotes. The stack includes several 100 Euro bills and one 200 Euro bill. The man is looking towards the camera with a slight smile. The background is dark and out of focus.

**Photomontage: Julian Saul**

Last week also saw the decision to appoint an avid supporter of the single currency, Sir David Simon, to a key ministerial role promoting competitiveness and the single market in Europe. In a recent pamphlet - *Emu the case for joining*, Sir David

Until now Labour, like the previous government, had been able to claim that Britain can "wait and see" because the single currency may not even happen. But the Chancellor will now realise that time to "wait and see" is fast disappearing and that Emu is

The Government is unlikely to focus attention on its decision until next month's Amsterdam summit on European political reforms is safely behind it.

Alluding to the "super-regions" of Orwell's 1984, Mr Talbot said: "The wrong kind of regional cohesion could lead to the wrong kind of interregional conflict." He went on: "We would encourage Europe to embrace the most inclusive version of what integration means. Co-operation *within* regions", he said, had to be matched by "cooperation *between* regions." What the US hopes for from European integration is trade and investment opportunities for

After the war, when Marshall aid was gratefully received, the risk of rivalry was inconceivable. Now, recent disputes - over Gatt's transformation into the World Trade Organisation, over US laws extending US sanctions to foreign companies trading with Cuba, and accusations both ways over state subsidies to the aircraft and defence industries - shows how easily rivalry could escalate. Europe is also increasingly prepared to stand up to the US.

In an indirect warning to the US about patronising Europe 50 years after the Marshall Plan, he said: "The United States should be wary about asking the EU to go faster [towards integration]: it is not US money, but EU money ... This is a grown-up negotiation between grown-up people."

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# Pope rejects pleas for crusading role in the Lebanon

Beirut — "We ask you ... to say those things which we fear to say and which we have lost the habit of saying," Pierre Najm pleaded with the Pope. "Be our courage and name things by their real name. Be our cry of unhappiness and carry our voice to the whole world."

But Pope John Paul II did not oblige the Lebanese student. There was no direct criticism of Syria, or of the thousands of troops it keeps in Lebanon, or of the domination which it exercises over the Lebanese government.

His response told the whole story of his visit to Lebanon. Yes, he told the student mass at the mountain of Harissa, he understood the frustrations of Lebanese Christians. But they must work for the future of Lebanon and rebuild their country. The message was simple: the Catholic church supported the total independence of Lebanon — but the Christians should stop complaining. "The best thing said was by that boy at Harissa," a middle-aged Christian woman told me as we pushed our way through 300,000 Maronites at yesterday morning's papal mass at what had been Beirut's front line during 16 years of civil war. "But the Pope's visit will make no difference."

She may be right. The Muslim hierarchy lined up to shake the papal hand, the Christians were reminded that Christ taught in Tyre and Sidon, and they were told by their Pope that "insofar as you share in Christ's sufferings, rejoice because the spirit of God rests

**Robert Fisk joins 300,000 Maronites attending mass on the former front line**

upon you." But this was not what they wanted to hear.

The few Maronites who chanted for the release of Dr Samir Geagea, the Christian Phalangist militia leader imprisoned for civil war murders — shouting "Hakim, Hakim" (Doctor, Doctor) in front of the altar — were not going to make any difference. Nor were the young men and women at the Harissa mass, anxious to illustrate their conviction that Lebanon lived under oppression, who tied their hands together with papal flags and placed sticking paper over their mouths.

The Pope was not going to attack Syria, nor support the Maronite conviction that Lebanon can have no freedom of speech nor human rights as long as it remains under Syria's control.

True, the Muslim clergy speak out boldly when they fear their people are in danger. But the Pope belongs to a different religion whose separation of theology and politics — "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's" — has never been truly understood by the Maronites. Caesar, as everyone here knows, lives in Damas-

cus — home also to many Christians — and the Vatican has no intention of adopting the suicidal cause of the brutal wartime Maronite militiamen.

At the end of his vast open-air mass yesterday, Pope John Paul released the text of a 200-page "apostolic exhortation" which called for the "complete independence" of Lebanon — code for an Israeli and Syrian withdrawal — adding that the "menacing occupation of southern Lebanon [by Israel] and the 'presence of non-Lebanese armed forces' (ie the Syrians) 'feeds passions, as well as the fear that the values of democracy ... which this country represents might be compromised'."

But that was all the Maronites received from the Pope. A chosen few, of course, kissed the papal hand, including clergymen, ministers and other Lebanese officials.

One of those who received such a privilege on Saturday was Elie Hobeika, Lebanese minister of electricity and water resources. Surely this could not be the same Elie Hobeika who, according to the Israelis, led their Christian Phalangist militia allies in the wholesale slaughter of hundreds of unarmed Palestinian Muslims at Sabra and Chatila camps in 1982? Indeed it was.

Mr Hobeika, however, still claims he was in Sweden at the time of the massacre. Which was just as well for the Pope, who was later to tell us that there is no sin so horrible that it cannot be forgiven.



Act of faith: Pope John Paul II waving to the crowd gathered for Sunday mass at a Beirut construction site Photograph: Reuters

## Zaire crisis: Villagers pay as rebels close in Mobutu's men go on final rampage

Mary Braid  
Kinshasa

At Kinshasa airport yesterday the poor were still picking up bricks from the carcass of the huge General Motors factory, abandoned after the 1991 pillage by rioting Zairean troops.

Less than a mile away Franklin Kumba surveyed his cosmetic store, more recently ransacked by the country's military. The walls outside are peppered with bullet holes and £15,000 of stock is gone.

A week ago six uniformed soldiers threatened to kill the store's elderly night watchman. They piled Mr Kumba's entire stock into a cart to be trundled off to their nearby barracks. But before they left they opened fire on the shop's stockroom.

For the past few weeks the people of this shanty settlement have locked their doors at 7pm and remained inside until daylight. The electricity supply was mysteriously lost last month and has not been restored. Everyone suspects the troops from Camp Ceta are cutting the wires. It makes night time shopping — and terrorising — much easier.

With his tiny daughter pulling at his leg a depressed Mr Kumba said he is finding it hard to get stock again. "I went to the commanding officer at the airport but he said these were bad times, the country was not well

and I should go home, stay quiet and forget about it."

It's been a long time since Zaire government troops were citizen-friendly. Just ask General Motors. But as Laurent Kabila's rebels close in on Kinshasa the army has stepped up the intimidation, theft and violence in Kinshasa. One of the

**'We can hear them shooting every night. They taunt us'**

last shanty suburbs on the road east to rebel held territory.

And their violence is laced with new menace towards a population which now openly despises them under ailing President Mobutu.

"We can hear them shooting now every night," said Astride Kapanga, 42, a mother of 11. "And they taunt us. They say you are happy to see Kabila come, but we will get you before he arrives. They are getting ready to pillage."

All of last week, she says, the soldiers were busy moving their families out of the area, a potential battlefield because of the nearby airport and the strategic

route east. "But we have nowhere else to go," said Mrs Kapanga.

"My sister-in-law was raped by five soldiers. This is very common. Young girls in particular cannot go out after dark."

In Kinshasa everyone agrees the soldiers are out of control. Their squats and camps have become no-go areas.

"They treat us like a field for harvesting," says Marcel, an unemployed graduate, who has no sympathy for the troops' own miserable lot. They are, he says, destroying the little other people have struggled to build in the crumbling Zaire.

In Kinshasa they blame President Mobutu. It is true he knows what is going on. But a Western missionary goes further. President Mobutu, he says, encourages the terror; it is an integral part of his military state. The President understands the implications of allowing thousands of city soldiers to go unpaid.

"It's vindictiveness on the President's part," says the missionary, who has worked in Zaire since the 1960s. "When democratisation began in 1990 and a free press opened up President Mobutu realised he was not liked by the people so he said 'if that is how you feel, you will get what you deserve'. Mobutu unleashed the military and now they are preparing for their final spree."

## Bishop rejects power role

Zaire's rebels yesterday accused foreign governments of trying to stop a revolution by brokering a deal which would transfer power from ailing dictator President Mobutu Sese Seko to the Zairean cleric Archbishop Laurent Monsengwo, writes Mary Braid.

The rebels, who have captured more than three-quarters of the country, insist President Mobutu must stand down and hand over power directly to rebel leader Laurent Kabila.

Yesterday the Archbishop said in Brussels that he would only bow to Zairean parliamentary pressure for him to accept the role under certain pre-conditions. In particular, he insisted his appointment should be acceptable to both sides. But

the rebels warned that if he took the job they would abandon talks and take Kinshasa by force. The rebels say President Mobutu is behind a plan designed simply to buy time.

"Mobutu is a devil and a trickster," said Bizima Karaha, the rebels' spokesman in Lubumbashi. "He has used the talks to reinforce his troops, bring in UNITA elements, former Rwandan troops, and consolidate his position in Kinshasa."

In the fierce battle last week for Kenge, 200kms east of Kinshasa, there were unconfirmed reports of Angolan government troops fighting for the Zairean rebels and Angolan UNITA rebels fighting for the Zairean government.

"Our response to this is that

we are abandoning our pledge (not to advance while talks were under way) and we are now advancing and will continue to advance. We shall now talk and fight and fight and talk."

That probably does not herald any change in strategy. But the rebels' fighting talk leaves the vexed question of what exactly Mr Kabila and President Mobutu will have to talk about if they meet — as they have agreed to do — for a second round of face-to-face talks on the South African supply ship Outiniqua on Wednesday.

The South Africans continue to insist a diplomatic breakthrough is imminent, but if both sides stick by their public statements it is difficult to see where it will come from.

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Hong Kong's quiet hero stands his ground

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## Hong Kong's quiet hero stands his ground

Stephen Vines  
Hong Kong

It is hard to envisage Martin Lee, Hong Kong's most prominent pro-democracy leader, standing on the barricades directing street protests. But the quietly spoken and sombrely dressed barrister believes that the streets may well be the only place where democrats can express their views after the Chinese takeover on 1 July.

Mr Lee is seen as public enemy number one by China's supporters in the colony, who are infuriated by the international attention he receives. Last month he was received by President Bill Clinton at the White House and Jean Chrétien, the Canadian Prime Minister, in Ottawa, while in Hong Kong he is not even invited for a warm orange juice at the China National Day reception – an event which even the Governor, Chris Patten, the "criminal through the ages", is asked to attend.

Interviewed in his harrister's chambers, surrounded by shelves of bulky legal volumes, the usually upbeat Mr Lee finds it hard to be optimistic.

"We will be going through a difficult stage," he says, shaking his head. He lists the problems. First, the Democrats will be kicked out of the legislature. Secondly, they will lose their main source of funding because his Democratic Party is heavily dependent on the salaries and allowances of its legislators to keep it afloat. Thirdly, they will become non-persons. "I don't expect many local papers will cover us; those who do will be writing deliberately nasty articles about us."

Yet he leads Hong Kong's biggest political party, which secured 65 per cent of the popular vote at the last Legislative Council elections. Mr Lee is also better known on the international stage than Tung Chee-hwa, who will lead the first post-colonial government of the territory.

Both Lu Ping, the most senior Chinese official responsible for Hong Kong affairs, and Mr Tung have recently said that they will not allow Mr Lee to become "a martyr". He is non-plussed by this pledge. "I'm interest-



Flying the flag: Martin Lee waves the Democratic Party banner to attract voters in the 1995 Legislative Council poll. Photograph: Reuters

ed to understand what they mean by that," he says. "First, I would have to die, and second I would have to do so in a just cause." Mr Lee is a practising Catholic and knows something about martyrdom. "I think it's part of a move to marginalise me because they can't argue with me. They're trying to write me off as a martyr. It's very cheap and very unfair."

In fact, Mr Lee sees many of the incoming government's actions heading in the direction of not being fair. He reckons that the new regime is trying to rig the election system so that the Democrats' 65 per cent share of the

vote will not translate itself into anything more than 25 per cent of the seats in the legislature. "They will make sure the laws will not give Hong Kong a legislature which represents the share of the vote of the majority party," he claims. He foresees a legislature which is "very boring. The only difference between the parties will be how low they kowtow to Peking."

Could not the Democrats be a little more accommodating towards China? "I think we've been extremely conciliatory," he says. He points out that Democrats have no argument with the notion that Hong Kong

should return to Chinese sovereignty, "we've never asked for independence, nor are we trying to start a revolution, we've even defended the renewal of China's most favoured trading nation status [in the United States]."

"What more can we do?" he asks, knowing full well that what is required is that the Democrats renounce their views on representative government and civil-liberties legislation. Mr Lee, of course, will have none of that. "If we cave in on that we might as well pack up and go home," he says.

"My fear," he says, "is that we're going down the Singapore route," by which he means authoritarian government with the semblance of democratic institutions still in place. "Mr Tung adores Lee Kuan Yew," he notes, referring to the strongman who created the Singaporean system.

He is vague about what the Democrats will do to combat the situation he envisages. Yet Mr Lee remains confident that his party will remain together; he says that the pressure is bringing them even closer together. His strategy, such as it is, seems to be simply to remain in the game, as the conscience of the new regime. "I think the whole world's going in this direction [of democracy]. So will we, unless we give up."

It sounds like empty rhetoric. But it comes from someone who seems an unlikely politician – who regularly ex-

presses his disinclination to be in politics, yet has founded Hong Kong's most successful political party.

He sees Mr Tung as being "a good man forced to do evil". "At the moment this is how the public is viewing him," he says. This is because the new Chief Executive seems to be "always standing on Peking's side".

Since entering the political arena, not much more than a decade ago, most of Mr Lee's fights have been with the colonial administration, yet he now feels that "Hong Kong people will miss Mr Patten very soon". He points to the number of people who were queuing up to be British subjects at the end of last year when Britain issued its last batch of passports. "I felt so sad for China," says Mr Lee. "This is the sunset of colonial rule and you still have so many of our compatriots queuing up to become British. Normally at the end of British rule you have strong anti-British feeling. Yet in Hong Kong you don't see that."

Nor will there be much chance of seeing Mr Lee leaving Hong Kong. "Hong Kong is my home. I cannot leave my people, particularly when they are going through such a difficult period."

Still, he describes Hong Kong as "not that beautiful a city to live in". He says that "when we finally have a good democratic system, then I can leave politics" – and maybe then Hong Kong as well.

## Singapore swaps new insults with its neighbour

Richard Lloyd Parry  
Johor Straits

The Straits of Johor, which divide Singapore and Malaysia, are no more than a few hundred yards across at their narrowest point, but between the two countries there exists an ocean of contrasts.

Singapore is a compact island city, Malaysia a sprawling federation of scattered states. The former has a majority Chinese population, while the latter is predominantly Malay. What is more, Singaporeans pee in lifts – something which Malaysians never do.

This, at least, was the message delivered last month by the Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, at a speech outlining his hopes for the country in the 21st century. He said Malaysians have some retrograde habits, such as hanging out their underwear in public.

"But we are more civilised than some people in Singapore," Dr Mahathir pointed out. "There, people urinate in lifts, so the authorities have placed sensors to detect ammonia to catch the culprits. But we don't do it here."

His remarks were only the most hilarious in an increasingly bizarre verbal battle being fought across the Johor Straits. The relationship between Singapore and Malaysia, two of Asia's most energetic and fast-growing countries, has long been touchy but, in the past few weeks, it has descended to unprecedented levels of pettiness and triviality.

The trouble began in March after an uncharacteristic faux pas by Lee Kuan Yew, the founder of modern Singapore, and now its formidable "Senior Minister". Along with several of his ministers, Mr Lee is pursuing a libel case against an opposition candidate, Tang Liang Hong, who crossed the Straits of Johor for Malaysia shortly after his defeat in the January general elections.

Mr Tang claimed that his life was in danger in Singapore, a claim which was scornfully denounced by the Senior Minister. "If there is anywhere where people can do him harm," said Mr Lee, in a written affidavit, "that is the place." He said Mr Tang's refuge, the city of Johor Baru, is "notorious for shootings, muggings and car-jackings".

In Malaysia, enraged newspaper columnists suggested cutting off the fresh water supplies which are piped across the Straits. Dr Mahathir pronounced himself "reasonably angry". Protesters paraded outside the Singaporean High Commission in Kuala Lumpur,

denouncing Mr Lee. His remarks were intended only to have been read by lawyers, but Mr Lee found himself in the humiliating position of apologising for them and asking for them to be deleted from the official record. But the squabble flared up again when the Singaporean *Straits Times* ran a long and detailed article about crime in Johor Baru.

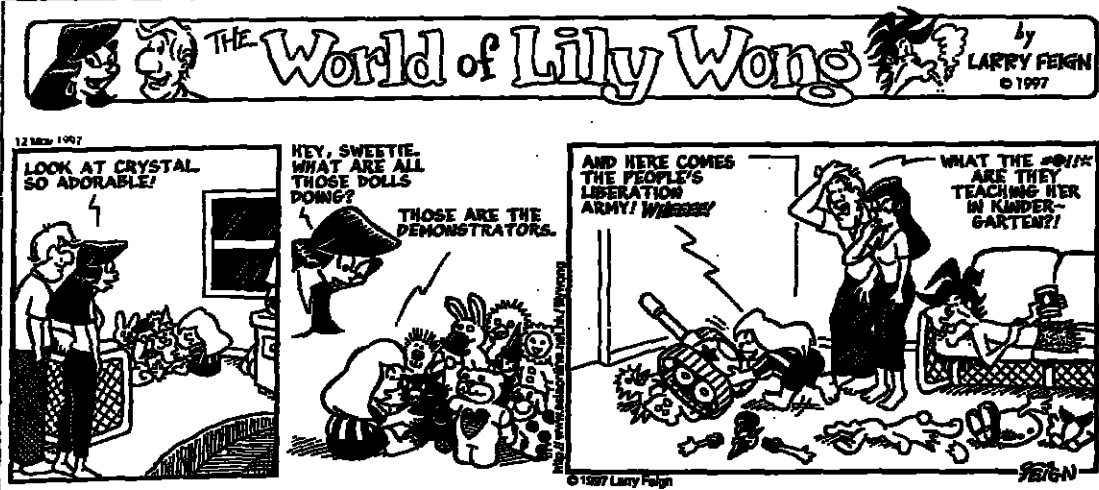
Malaysian journalists accused Mr Lee of using the paper to propagate his chauvinist opinions, despite the pretence of his apology. "The leaders of Singapore [are like] the murai bird which talks incessantly but whose feathers are covered in faeces," wrote a columnist in the *Weekly Malaysia*. "Their mouths smell sweet, but their tail-ends smell sour."

However infantile, the quarrel is an expression of genuine and deep-rooted tensions between the two states which date back more than 30 years. In 1965, fears of racial tension between Chinese and Malays caused Singapore to be kicked out of the Malaysian Federation. Since then the countries have enjoyed very different fortunes.

**“The quarrel is an expression of deep-rooted tensions between the two nations dating back 30 years”**

Singapore is a model of neatness and prosperity, if a rather soulless one – carefully driven cars circulate obediently around shiny modern high-rises and litter-free parks. Cross the causeway over the Straits, and this rather anxious order dissolves in a mess of old plaster buildings, street markets and suicidal motorcyclists. Johor is booming in its own way, but it is crumbling, grimmer, and more unpredictable than Singapore.

That Singaporeans are envied by Malaysians is no wonder. They are six times richer than their neighbours, with an average GNP of \$24,000 (£15,000) per person, compared to \$4,000 in Malaysia. Levels of literacy and life expectancy are higher, infrastructure and housing standards are better and, if Malaysians are less inclined to pee in lifts, that is because many more of their apartment blocks have only flights of stairs.



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## arts

# Now is the month of Maying.

The bare-faced antics of Oxford students may distract from Magdalen's choral Mayfest. But the college choir is now moving into a new dawn. By **Andrew Stewart**

A few years back some bright spark hatched the idea of restoring Clerkenwell to the cultural map of London by holding an annual Ascension Day service on the roof of a local church. Despite trumpet flourishes and choral outbursts, the new "tradition" reached little further than a nearby team of jobbing builders and a handful of bemused Japanese tourists, adding little to Clerkenwell's status and even less to its popular history. Down in Oxford, where traditions mature more slowly, rooftop performance has been customary since Elizabethan times, when the choristers and academic clerks of Magdalen College first climbed the narrow stairs of the college's Great Tower to sing praises to the rising May Day sun.

The Magdalen Mayfest, unlike its short-lived Clerkenwell imitation, continues to attract a vast army of spectators, spaced out in more than one sense at the foot of the tower and packed sardine-like on Magdalen Bridge. While the choir sings *Te Deum* *Patrem Collins* and delivers a lusty account of Morley's *Now is the month of Maying*, the bravest if not soberest of all-night revellers below prepare to leap into the chill shallows of the Cherwell. This year, a bare-arsed Scot and scantily-clad blondes provided the main attractions for eager tabloid photographers, although they were spared any greater danger by the earlier removal from the river of shopping trolleys, old bicycles and a roll of barbed-wire.

Last week's service was accompanied by expectant talk among the tower company of New Labour's new dawn, reinforced when lingering mists on the neighbouring water meadows dispersed as the sun rolled into a cloudless sky. In former times, the Magdalen choristers would finish their early morning work, throw off their surplices and rush downstairs to tackle the bell ropes for a spot of wild "jangling". Today, a team of change-ringers is in place to ensure an ordered peal, although the effects of swinging bells on the foundationless Great Tower remain the same. I was told to grab the parapet by one May morning veteran:



"It'll start to move in a second." Sure thing, I thought. Must be the combined effects of sleep deprivation and severe alcohol abuse, another Oxford May Day tradition. Seconds later it became clear that the college's 15th-century builders had allowed for a wide degree of lateral swing in William of Waynflete's tower, not quite enough to produce a landslide result but sufficient to cause problems for those who prefer their medieval buildings to stay firmly in one place.

Magdalen's place in the history of English music rests on firmer foundations than either its tower or its annual novelty act. The statutes of William of Waynflete's *collegium beatae Mariae Magdalenae vulgariter dictum Maudekylene College in Universitate Oxon.* set down on 12 June 1458, make provision for eight clerks, 16 choristers and their master or *informator choristarum*. The new college attracted a succession of outstanding composers to the post of *informator*, including Richard Davy, whose work is well represented in the Eton Choirbook, John Mason, Thomas Appleby, Thomas Preston, and the brilliant John Sheppard, who served the college at various times during the 1540s. More recent Magdalen composer-musicians include Richard Nicholson, the first Heather Professor of Music at Oxford Uni-

versity, Henry Purcell's brother Daniel, John Stainer of *Crucifixion* fame, Walter Parratt, Bernard Rose and the present *informator* Grayston Ives, perhaps better known as ex-King's Singer Bill Ives.

A new disc from Collins Classics presents an unusually rich slice of Magdalen music history, offered up to the memory of Bernard Rose, who died towards the end of last year, and featuring contributions from many of his students. The 20-strong Magdalen Collection was convened by Harry Christophers last December, shortly after the Thanksgiving Mass that followed Rose's funeral, its members chosen from the ranks of former Academic Clerks to sing the sonorous, often florid works of Davy, Mason and Sheppard. Christophers, conductor of The Sixteen and, like his old choir master, a champion of Tudor church music, received musical support from Magdalen graduates Roger Bray, David Wulstan and David Hiley, while Rose's conductor son Gregory served as producer for the Collins sessions. The vocal line-up included such seasoned pros as Hilliard Ensemble colleagues David James and Paul Elliott, two barristers, one general practitioner and a handful of rising star singers, counter-tenor Robin Blaze and tenor Mark Milhofer prominent among them.

"Seeing the way Anthony Smith, the President of Magdalen, is taking the whole college into the next century made many of us want to do something to help," explains Christophers. "We couldn't afford to donate big cheques, but realised that it might be possible to get together and make a recording. We made an absolute racket when we got together at an evening for Bernard's 80th birthday celebrations last May, but there were still traces of the special Magdalen sound he established. He was in favour of a free singing style and would never hold us back." Profits from the Magdalen Collection disc will go towards restoring the Magdalen chapel organ and the purchase of a new chamber organ. "We had an ancient Snetzler chamber organ in the chapel during my time in the choir," recalls Christophers,



'May Morning on Magdalen Tower', 1890, by William Holman Hunt; inset, a student at this year's Magdalen Mayfest leaping into the river

"which was a semitone flat. It offered a great training for the organ scholars, who had to transpose all these elaborate Tudor pieces up to modern pitch, much to Bernard's glee." Following Rose's retirement in 1981, the main organ was rebuilt and its cranky chamber associate banished from the chapel.

Although Rose earned the respect of his cathedral and collegiate organist colleagues, his choir never received the public acclaim given to those trained by Simon Preston down the road at Christ Church or David Wilcocks over at King's College, Cambridge. "As an academic, he made a great contribution to the study of Tudor church music and

encouraged his choir members to specialise in that repertoire," observes Christophers. "I think this is what Oxford collegiate chapels, like Magdalen, should be doing now, rather than chasing record contracts. Bernard was never really one for making records, but people still appreciate just how much he contributed to the Tudor music revival through his scholarship and energy." The seeds of that revival were carefully propagated by Bernard Rose, encouraging the archival researches of Roger Bray, David Wulstan's more controversial ideas on performance practice and Harry Christophers' explorations of late 15th- and early 16th-century English church music.

"In the choirs he put together year after year, he never shied away from taking 'difficult' people. He didn't necessarily want only the best singers for Magdalen if they were lacking in character, but would rather tame those who were outspoken or individual. Although the youngsters on our disc were not there during Bernard's time, somehow his spirit comes through in their singing. The biggest tribute I could pay is to say that Bernard never made his choristers and clerks into those of previous choir members, which happens all too often elsewhere." Christophers went up to Oxford in 1973 to study classics, switching to music without the sup-

port of an A-level in the subject. "It was Bernard who took me on and saw me through the degree. He wasn't one of those boorish academics who lack patience; even if you asked the most banal or stupid of questions during a choir practice, he would never make you look ridiculous in front of others. Through singing the music and talking to Bernard, somehow you became totally enveloped in it and passionate about it."

'Music from Magdalen', including works by Richard Davy, John Mason and John Sheppard, by the Magdalen Collection Harry Christophers on Collins Classics 15112

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### THEATRE

#### The Seagull Old Vic, London

In the past few years, we've been subjected to a spate of grossly over-directed productions of Chekhov's *The Seagull*. First there was John Caird's Olivier version which opened with the whole cast drifting across a twilight stage, like Pirandello characters in search of an author, and which went on to enclose the action in a series of four gilt picture-frames. Then there was Robert Sturua's doggedly perverse account which turned Dr Dorn into a detached intermediary between stage and audience, and which was full of wearisome editorialising ideas, like having Trigorin, the celebrity novelist who is never off duty, blatantly scribble down notes, even at the end as he observed the effect of that famous off-stage gunshot.

By rights, therefore, you should feel grateful for the straightforwardness of Peter Hall's new staging in which the hand of the director is much less obtrusively evident. But his production leaves well alone to the undue extent of rarely freshening one's perceptions of the material. The brilliantly observed inconsistencies and

self-contradictions of which Chekhov's characters are composed are brought, in the main, to only half-hearted life.

The most impressive features of the evening are Tom Stoppard's new version of the script and Victoria Hamilton's vivid, deeply felt Nina. Dispensing with what he calls the "ledger" principle of translation (whereby "everything on the Russian side of the line is accounted for on the English side"), Stoppard has produced a vigorously speakable text.

The fact that the central relationships mirror those in *Hamlet* is further reflected here in stily, jokey Shakespearean allusions ("I never think about old age or death. What will be will be, if it be not now - and so on," declares Stoppard's Akadina, breezily yoking a half-remembered snatch of *Hamlet* to a clunking cliché, as an airy professional actress well might).

The translator's instinct for comedy helps heighten the humour in Chekhov's situations. When Dominic West's Konstantin moodily marches in and plunks a dead seagull at her feet, this Nina retorts: "I mean, look at this seagull, a symbol if ever



Michael Pennington as Trigorin with Felicity Kendal in Peter Hall's new staging of *The Seagull*. Photograph: Geraint Lewis

I saw one, but of what, I'm sorry, I've no idea." The embarrassing mixture of obviousness and nebulousness in Konstantin's gesture is beautifully highlighted in that exasperated parade of would-be *savoir-faire*. It reminded me of a conversely great moment in a John Guare play, where the hero muses: "I don't know much about symbols, but I'd say when frozen flamingos fall out of the sky, good times are not in store."

In the first three acts, Ms Hamilton's Nina is positively aglow with the ardour of youthful inexperience and keyed up to orchestra pitch (her guilelessly eager performance of Konstantin's experimental play is a hilarious expose of its pretentiousness). In the last, veering between near-delirious tears and a desolately shrugging mat-

ter-of-factness, she's become a battered realist who, here, trudges prosaically, instead of poetically flying, out of the play.

Mr West could make a splendid Konstantin, but neither he nor the production are helped by Felicity Kendal who, as his selfish, jealously manipulative great-aunt mother, runs her usual gamut, all the way from "pen" to "roughish". With the dimpling Ms Kendal about as likely to deliver the part in Esperanto as risk alienating an audience, you feel more embarrassed about the wildly unsuitable vig inflicted on Michael Pennington's Trigorin than you do about the mortifying painfulness of the central mother-son relationship.

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Paul Taylor

### COMEDY

#### Jo Brand Civic Hall, Guildford

The good burghers of leafy, stockbroker-friendly Guildford are looking forward to the charms of David Essex crooning such genteel classics as "We're Going to Make You a Star" at their Civic Hall soon. So they might have been expected to choke into their Amonillados at the very thought of Jo Brand, the oversized, Struwell-Peter-coiffed, foul-mouthed flagellator of all the things they hold dear: maleness, Toryness, suburbaness. Her act, which she performed there on Wednesday night as part of her national tour, contains more swearing and sexual references than the entire work of Tarantino and Cronenberg put together.

During one completely unrepeatable routine about maggots somewhere they shouldn't have been (which Channel 4 had refused to broadcast), even Brand seemed worried about shucking the gin-and-Jag bel-

ters and warned them to put their fingers in their ears. When she had elicited the requisite number of "oohs", she added with special relish: "Do tell that to as many people as possible over dinner."

But, like a ravenous crowd in front of a table full of cream cakes, they simply scoffed the lot. The audience were so well tuned to Brand's particular brand of humour that the very mention of the word "chocolate" early on was greeted with whoops of delight.

Brand is canny in getting her retaliation in first: she voices the negative thoughts people may have about her appearance and turns them to her own comic advantage. Fat may

be a feminist issue, but Brand proved it can also be a barrel-load of laughs. Clad in her standard-issue baggy black T-shirt and trousers offset by glittery Doctor Martens, she laughed: "I quite like looking like this because at least I don't have to drink Martini every time I go to a party." She went on to reveal that she had just spent the weekend in Norway where whaling is still legal - "so I couldn't go swimming, obviously."

She also confronted the widely held canard that she is gay: "I know you think I'm a lesbian," she teased at one point, "but I'm heterosexual. So, men, be very scared because I want to shag you."

People are drawn to her honesty about herself. We can all identify with someone suffering from a terminal lack of self-esteem - even if we wouldn't want to parade ours in front of several hundred strangers every night.

As a performer, Brand gives and receives great warmth. She passes the acid test for a popular comedian: people laugh before she's even said anything. Apart from the singing - she did an ill-advised version of "The Lady is a Tramp" as an encore - the only danger is that sooner or later audiences may tire of her schtick. How many different ways can you say "cakes are great and men aren't?"

Jo Brand's national tour continues at Watford Coliseum on Wed (01923 445000); Manchester Bridgewater Hall on Thurs (0161-907 9000). Tour info: 0891 455480

James Rampton

Tomorrow in the Tabloid: Andrew Graham-Dixon on the Mummy Portraits from Roman Egypt





Bid for fame: If nothing else, he will go down in history as the only man to have launched a campaign from Ms Gorman's cleavage. Photograph: Glynn Griffiths

## Of course he's Mr Right...

I am fond of John Redwood. Truly, I am. I'm not saying we're about to get married, or elope or anything. I don't especially want to have sex with him. But should he ever come up for adoption, then, yes, I'd take him in. And happily so.

Now, I know what you are thinking. You are thinking I'm completely out of my tree. You are thinking it's hard enough to like John Redwood, let alone develop a motherly crush on him. He's a cold fish. He doesn't get jokes. He's rubbish at relating to people. ("Your strange human emotions confuse me, Captain.") Plus, to cap it all, he has the disdainful look of, say, Kenneth Williams in a particularly disdainful mood. And that's when he's feeling jolly. Yes, all this is true enough, to varying degrees. But, mostly, Redwood is just hopeless. Which makes him quite vulnerable. And endearing, in a strange kind of way. He is tall, with dark eyes, wonderful legs and highly polished black shoes. He speaks in an exclamatory way, emphasising certain words without warning. "I think! that what the Tories have! to learn is how to like each other." The volume is such that you can never doze off, which is a shame, especially when he's banging on about party unity or Europe.

He also has an extraordinarily literal mind. Did you like books as a child, John? "Yes, very much." Is there a book you particularly remember enjoying? "As a very young child?" Not necessarily. "As an older child, then?" A book from any period of your childhood. Just one you happen to remember clearly. "As a very young child then?" This goes on for some minutes before, finally, I learn that he liked *Brer Rabbit* before

progressing to sea adventure stories set during the Napoleonic wars. No, he never then acted these out because "we never had a pond big enough." Clever as he undoubtedly is, I don't think John Redwood could be described as a man of imagination. His smile is always accompanied by a startled look in his eyes, as if he's astonished he has managed it, which I find quite touching. Plus, he has the stiff body movements of someone who, perhaps, spent his boyhood being told to wash his hands, take his elbows off the table, and don't play there! You'll get your sailor-suit all mucky! I would like him to come and live with me so that, of a morning, I could open the back door into the garden and say: "Now, don't come back until you're really muddy." In short, he looks as if he has never let himself go. Certainly, I can't imagine him ever doing the conga on holiday.

However, when I eventually put this thesis to him, he is entirely horrified. He knows being told to wash his hands, take his elbows off the table, and don't play there! You'll get your sailor-suit all mucky! I would like him to come and live with me so that, of a morning, I could open the back door into the garden and say: "Now, don't come back until you're really muddy." In short, he looks as if he has never let himself go. Certainly, I can't imagine him ever doing the conga on holiday.

when the adoption papers come through, I will put in a clause that I remain in charge of the remote control. Anyway, John Redwood is, on the car front, very much a Jaguar man. Always has been, always will be. He has two at the moment, a confession which leads him and the photographer to talk excitedly about E-types, and '65 being a good year, and four-point-two-stroke-six engines, whatever they may be. He actually has a photograph of his Jaguars on the mantelpiece. "There they are, my two lovely ladies," he boasts. His wife, Gail, is also in the picture. "Or should I say my three lovely ladies, ha ha."

And, yes, this brings me to yet another reason why I'm so fond of John Redwood. He's just such a brilliant malarkey. He is, it is said,

perhaps even the brainiest of all the Tories. But his social skills are so wanting he always ends up looking at best, weird, and at worst a complete twit. Certainly, he can't spot a political mine-field until it blows up in his face. There was, of course, that bottom-clenching moment when he was Minister for Wales and was caught on camera trying and failing to mouth the words to the Welsh national anthem. Then there was

that Monday morning in June 1995 when, at a press briefing to launch his first leadership bid, he allowed a goggle-eyed Teresa Gorman in something very green and low-cut to stand directly behind him. When I tell him that, if nothing else, he will go down in history as the only man to have launched a campaign from Ms Gorman's cleavage, he laughs heartily. Surprisingly, he laughs a lot, which is nice even though there's usually, initially, a pause of at least a few seconds while he works out whether something is funny or not. Once his laughter has subsided he says, pleadingly: "What could I do? A number of people invited themselves to the conference and, as I needed all the support I could get, I didn't think it a good idea to shepherd them off." So he opted for a good nestle in Teresa's bosom instead? "I can assure you," he announces primly, "that there was a modest gap between us."

Joke, John, joke. "Oh ha ha! Well, let's put it this way. My wife wasn't jealous. Ha ha!" Of course, he is now running for the leadership of the Conservative Party again. Most people doubt he will get it. Most have their money on William Hague, who looks like Clive Anderson's plainer younger brother but is still reckoned to be more charismatic. If Redwood fails this

time, what then? "I've no idea. I do so much want to get it. I'm going all out to get it." He is very single-minded, ambitious, determined. He wants to be in No 10 more than anything. So I wonder whether he found it hard watching Tony Blair move in. "I didn't watch it. I was too busy," he says. Oh come on, I say. The pictures were beamed all over the place. You can't have missed them all. OK, he finally concedes,

### Interview



Deborah Ross talks to JOHN REDWOOD

maybe he did deliberately choose not to look. "I would have found it upsetting, yes."

We meet at 2 Wilfred Street, a dainty, oatmeal-carpeted house in Westminster which is in fact the headquarters of the ginger group Conservative 2000 (it exists to represent the views of right-wing Tories) but could just as well be the base for the John Redwood Fan Club. There are photographs of John everywhere, plus flattering articles about him that have been framed and hung in the toilet (perhaps, this being the smallest room, they look more plentiful there). There's an admiring letter from Enoch Powell, dated July 1995. "Dear John," it goes, "you will not regret the events of the last month or two. Patience will eventually have to be exercised..."

John Redwood was born in Dover to the aspiring lower middle classes. His father, William, was a cost accountant; his mother, Amy, was manageress of a shoe shop. Their first home was a council house, but he's never made a big deal of this in the way John Major always did. "It's just not my style. And, anyway, it's who you are now that counts." What's his earliest childhood memory? "As a very young child?" No, John, as a sheep. "I remember sitting in front of a coal fire that refused to burn, and being freezing." He was very bright, very bookish, and skipped a year in primary school before, at 10, winning a scholarship to Kent College in Canterbury. At 15, he joined the Conservative Party because "I believed in their principles." He took a first in history at Magdalen, Oxford, and then completed his doctorate at night while working as an investment analyst in the City. Has he ever known any kind of intellectual defeat? "Oh yes. I always found Latin very hard." He was working for Rothschild and writing articles on the privatisation of nationalised industries when he came to the attention of Thatcher and was invited to join her policy unit at No 10. No, he didn't think twice about leaving the bank even though it meant a huge cut in salary, plus giving up a chauffeur-driven Jag for a Montego. A Montego! Did he weep

when he was handed the keys? "No. You don't get the keys. The driver does." He then adds: "I had to work my way up again. I got a chauffeur-driven Jag at the Welsh office, but it wasn't such a good Jag, of course." Having joined the Policy Unit in 1982, he became its "extremely effective" leader (according to Thatcher's memoirs) from '83 to '85 before being rewarded with the safe seat of Wokingham, Berkshire. Thereafter, he ascended through the Tory Party ranks until his resignation from Cabinet when he decided to stand against Major. He says he was "shocked, but not surprised" by the extent of the Tory's election defeat. "On the morning of the election I said to my wife: 'I think we'll get 200 seats.' And I knew I was being optimistic then." Yes, he supposes it is a good thing for him that Portillo is now out of the leadership contest but, that said, he was sad to see him go. "A great loss to the party," he sighs. I wonder what the protocol is in these circumstances. Do you write a note saying "so sorry, old boy..." "No, you phone." "I have rung quite a few already. I'm gradually getting through the list." Will he ring Major? "Of course." If Redwood had won the leadership back in 1995, could he have saved the party? Yes, he would like to think so. Certainly, he couldn't have done any worse.

He once described New Labour as "just three men (Blair, Campbell, Mandelson, presumably) in a hurry." But, no, he doesn't now feel he has to eat his words. "It'll come true. You watch!" he cries. "The Minister for Meddling (Mandelson) will cause terrible trouble. Departments resent meddlers. There will be a great battle for Blair's ear. You watch! You watch!" I wonder, naturally, why he so badly wants to lead his own party. Is it because he is only truly alive when he's achieving things, and this would be among the ultimate achievements? Absolutely not, he insists, offended. "I am not pursuing office for the sake of office," he says. "I want to achieve things for the country and the Party." But it's all such a fuss, I say, and such a stressful fuss at that. All this running about to check who's sided up with whom. All the skulduggery that goes on. No time for Top Gear or Waitrose. Isn't he ever tempted to think, no, not today, I'll take one of my lovely ladies out for a run? At this, he gives you one of his best Kenneth Williams looks before coming back with: "But I really enjoy what I'm doing. I'm very privileged and have a fascinating job. When I wake up in the mornings I think: 'What good can I do today?'"

## The thin line between cure and obsession

The Princess of Wales says exercise has enabled her to overcome bulimia. Perhaps it is just another way of subduing her body. By Jerome Burne

Can someone with an emotional problem decide when they are cured? If faulty brain chemistry is involved, where does that leave psychotherapy? What difference does it make if there is a genetic link? Such questions are prompted by the latest news about the Princess of Wales's eating disorder - via yet another treacherous confidant.

Last week she revealed to patients at Priory Hospital in south-west London that, although she had spent many hours and thousands of pounds on a variety of brands of psychotherapy, in the end she found it pointless because the practitioners she had seen had not known what she had gone through. Instead, she announced, exercise was what kept her bulimia at bay.

So a slap in the face for therapy? Not necessarily, because once you enter the psychotherapeutic hall of mirrors, where nothing is quite what it seems, there are several ways of looking at that. It could indeed be the simple truth. Exercise is a good way of dealing with depression and it might be that the Princess has got it sorted. But therapists have perfected an irrefutable defence when faced with ungrateful clients. "In denial" they say, or "counter-transference".

Here, for instance, is an expert writing in the venerable *American Family Physician*: "Anorexic patients frequently deny the severity of their illness, which makes therapy difficult. They perceive their thinking as being entirely rational and the rest of the world as dysfunctional." However, even when they are not blaming the victim, the experts' own performance is not that impressive - the cure rate for anorexia is reckoned to be between 45 per cent and 60 per cent and long-term about 20 per cent die from the condition.

But maybe the Princess's therapy was successful in that it gave her the confidence to look after herself. However, here the issue gets even more tricky because a well-known sign of anorexia is an obsession with exercise. The sufferer just replaces one method of subduing and controlling their alienated body with another. So the question then becomes, how much is too much?

Faced with all this conceptual confusion, it is not surprising that many eating disorder researchers are starting to take a more biologically based approach and are trying to find the key to anorexia in the chemical workings of the brain. Another of the revelations from the Priory - that the Princess had idolized her older sister Sarah who was anorexic - fits in well with the latest thinking. "There definitely seems to be a genetic element in anorexia and bulimia," says Nigel Brown at the Eating Disorders research unit at Maudsley Hospital in south London. "Identical-twins studies show that it does run in families."

As yet there is no clear idea of what the genes might be coding for but a popular candidate is one of the brain's messenger chemicals. "After we've eaten, serotonin is released in the brain which tells the appetite centre 'I'm full'," Brown says. "Now it could be that in anorexics the signalling system sends the message out too soon or that the receiving end is over-sensitive and responds to tiny amounts." All of which raises the possibility of a drug treatment to restore serotonin functioning to normal, but whether that would be more effective than therapy and/or exercise no one knows yet.

But for all our neurochemical sophistication, a glance at history suggests that some things never change. Next year is the 100th anniversary of the death of "Sisi", Empress of Austria, who after four children still had a 22-inch waist at the age of 60, after a lifetime battling with her weight. Her story sounds remarkably familiar.

From a bourgeois background, she married very young into the rigidly orchestrated protocol of the imperial court where her mother-in-law firmly pulled the strings. She was a great beauty, very shy, who at one point wanted to devote her life to caring for mental patients. Feeling stifled and unloved at court, she soon separated from her husband and spent much of her time visiting the spas and health centres of Europe. Her recipe for keeping slim, besides fasting, was constant exercise - horse-riding, lengthy walks, gymnastics and fencing. Could her genes have found their way into the Spencers?

Once you enter therapy's hall of mirrors, where nothing is quite what it seems, there are several ways of looking at what she says



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He laughs a lot, which is nice - after a pause while he works out whether it's funny or not

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## the leader page

## What Labour didn't tell the middle classes

Putting up the cost of mortgages? That was not in Labour's manifesto. If Gordon Brown does the right thing, long advocated here and by most economic commentators, and cuts tax relief on mortgages in an early Budget on 10 June, many new Labour voters will be understandably upset. Thirty-one days into the new era and Labour would have broken its promise not to put up taxes.

During the election campaign, Labour's position was never quite watertight on the small print. Hard questions were always deflected with: "I'm not sitting here writing a Budget." But the headlines were clear. No increases in income tax rates, and no hidden spending plans that required tax increases. In theory, that means Mr Brown could put up taxes on other grounds, and two such have been advanced from most sectors of the punditry. One is as an alternative or supplement to higher interest rates, in order to restrain the consumer boom, and the other is to start to balance the Government's books at a faster rate. Both are sound reasons: consumer spending is rising too quickly and government borrowing is falling too slowly. But there was another part of the Labour mantra on taxes, which was "22 tax rises" – again and again Tony Blair told us that people on middle incomes had suffered enough. And, if there is one law of modern politics that Messrs Blair,

Brown and Mandelson understand, it is that putting up taxes after promising not to is electoral death.

So, taxes ought to rise, but cannot. Mr Brown will not take back the £2.5bn hand-out to the electorally volatile home-owning classes represented by mortgage tax relief. Not, that is, unless he gives it back to (most of) them in the form of tax cuts elsewhere.

Now this is where discussions on the connecting corridor between Nos 10 and 11 Downing Street get interesting. As Mr Brown crosses over from his office to his living quarters, tripping over mountain bikes and footballs, and bumps into Mr Blair, furtively kicking the cat, the Chancellor is bound to be tempted by the idea of a Big Bang Budget. Why not try to rebalance the tax system, without significantly raising the tax burden, in one bold move, and do away with the need for a second Budget in November?

On the other hand, we know that this is one subject on which the two men disagreed before the election. Discussing how Mr Brown should answer the Tory charge that he would put up taxes in his early Budget, Mr Blair overruled him, according to Robert Harris's inside account of the campaign. "You should say that the only reason you're holding the Budget is to introduce welfare-to-work," he said. But different imperatives rule now. And in any case, the Budget will include, as well as the



jobs programme funded by the wind-fall levy on privatised companies, a cut in VAT on domestic gas and electricity and the start of the phased release of council house receipts. So why not go further? An early Budget would be a wise way to capitalise on the goodwill which the new government has generated. Rather than being the bad news which brings the honeymoon to an end, a good early Budget could reinforce the sense – already a "new dawnist" cliché – that Labour has "hit the ground sprinting".

Mr Brown has a clear idea of the kind of rebalancing the tax system

needs. "Growth, employment, long-term investment and greater equality" are the principles which guide him, the Chancellor said yesterday. Apart from the fourth, these are not controversial, but more specific measures have been signalled. A shift in company and capital gains taxes in favour of long-term investment has long been expected. Faint hints have been dropped about the need to shift the tax burden from green activities to pollution and other threats to the environment. Another clear priority of the new government is to change the interaction between benefits and taxes to encourage work and

discourage welfare dependency.

What has not been advertised in advance, however, is a raid on what has been called the middle-class welfare state, the "handout to home-owners". The case for it is overwhelming. Since the war, the use of their homes by the British as a store of wealth has been destabilising, magnifying consumer booms and busts and fuelling inflation. It has exaggerated and reinforced social division. Ending the tax subsidy of mortgages would therefore meet the Chancellor's objectives. Nor can Peter Lilley, likely to be the new shadow Chancellor, complain: the Conservatives cut the rate of relief to 15 per cent.

The pillage of middle-income perks would be politically survivable if it were carried out early and a new starting rate of income tax of 10p in the pound were brought in at the same time. That would tilt the pattern of winners and losers in favour of those on lower incomes, while improving incentives to take up low-paid work. The start of a house-price boom is the best time to act, because a rising market both eases the pain and needs to be dampened.

But, however much this newspaper would applaud the abolition of mortgage tax relief, it has to be said that the electorate should have been told in advance. Making the Bank of England independent was not in the manifesto either, although it was hinted at in some cloudy words about making the setting

of interest rates more open, and last week's announcement was trailed some time ago as an "option" in speeches and policy documents. Again, it is a commendable move, but why not commend it to the voters first?

So long as things are going the Government's way, complaints will be muted. After all, since Labour won it has been very clearly saying what it means and meaning what it says. Pity that same could not be said for what went on before the election.

## Jammin' til the joke sinks in

Lead vocals and guitar, Tony Blair. Saxophone, Bill Clinton. Drums, Rudolf Scharping. Sadly, it was not to be. The celebration party featuring a "victory jam session" was a ruse by a German satirical magazine. Three leaders of Germany's Social Democrats fell for it, including Gerhard Schröder, who wants to repeat Mr Blair's success next year against Chancellor Kohl. And Herr Scharping, who said, "I can't play anything, I can't even sing," but still insisted that he should be allowed, as president of the European socialists, to bang his bongo drums next to Mr Blair. Which goes to show that some Germans have a sense of humour – and others don't.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Food agency must tackle health risks

Sir: The welcome given to Professor Philip James' interim report on a food standards agency ("Food safety brief switches to health", 9 May) needs to be tempered in light of the unpredictable risks of genetically engineered (GE) foods, recognised in the report as one of the four major concerns to be addressed.

Welcome though separation of powers and openness would be, a more fundamental question should be how to handle risks like GE food where science leaves inevitable uncertainties. It is not good enough to regulate once scientific uncertainties are reduced. As BSE has shown, by then both the health dangers and public confidence can become unmanageable. Yet rarely is the option of risk avoidance taken.

No technical assessment has a way of predicting all the possible effects of eating GE foods, day in day out for years on end. Lay observers recognise this and urge caution, but decision-makers look at the assertion that there is "no evidence" and treat it as if it means "no risk" – so we are all rapidly becoming part of a massive experiment in eating GE food.

A new food agency must tackle this issue head on. The agency must be able to call a halt to such new developments with their unpredictable consequences. This means a very broad remit, much broader than that envisaged, and yet is inherent in gaining the public confidence that the agency's promoters yearn for.

Dr DOUGLAS PARR  
Campaign Director  
Greenpeace  
London NI

## Distortions and myths of voting

Sir: John Diamond's comments on proportional representation (Letters, 7 May) need answering, to correct some of the myths spouted by first-past-the-post (FPTP) advocates.

In general, politicians are open about coalition-forming in countries where this happens. Where they are not, it is largely as a result of the country's political culture. Some of the arrangements Mr Diamond suggests, such as Lib-Lab or Lib-Tory-Green-Referendum-Bell, would not happen, either because they have been specifically ruled out or the parties concerned would not agree to it.

It is only a quirk of geography that causes FPTP to create stable single-party governments in the UK. In India it does nothing of the sort. Under FPTP, India has a fragmented party system and an unstable coalition government.

The possibility of getting more seats on fewer votes is something on which FPTP advocates are strangely quiet. This, of course, happened in the UK in 1951 and 1974. Another example of where FPTP has failed in this way comes from Liverpool in the late 1980s, where the Liberals consistently out-pollled Labour, but Labour had an overall majority on the city council. FPTP is a lottery: the distortions it produces are arbitrary.

Mr Diamond is concerned about unpredictable coalition arrangements: there are many ways to skin this cat. In Israel, the Prime Minister is directly elected. In Greece and Turkey, the largest



party is systematically given a bonus of seats in an otherwise fairly proportional system. Under the single transferable vote electoral system, voters can indicate their coalition preferences by way of their transfer of votes between candidates: in fact, in the Republic of Ireland, where STV is used, it is not at all uncommon for two parties to propose coalitions with joint manifestos, and for each party to invite its voters to support the joint programme by supporting the other party in its lower preferences. In 1973 there was a Fine Gael/Labour manifesto.

ALEX MACFIE  
Keele, Staffordshire

Sir: We did not see any Lib-Lab or Lib-Lib manifesto (Letters, 7 May), but that is because of the system, where the formation of such coalitions is unlikely to be necessary.

In Germany, where the additional member system is used, there are two broad coalitions, which have been established for some time. If a voter in Germany votes for the Free Democrats, then they know prior to the election that this will also help Helmut Kohl's Christian Democrats to secure a majority in the Bundestag.

A coalition of separate parties free to voice their opinions is surely better than having large divided parties, where factions are forced to conceal their views.

DAVID ADAMS  
Fareham, Hampshire

Sir: Tactical voting was acknowledged by most political commentators as the key to the Tory rout on 1 May. In constituencies as far apart as Tayside North, Taunton, Lewes and Dover its devastating firepower

unseated Tory MPs. If there had been more coherent tactical voting in over 120 other constituencies such as Dorset West, Mid Dorset and Poole North, Dorset South and Conington the Tories would have been reduced to third party arithmetic in the new Parliament.

Grot (Get Rid of Them) and its sister organisation the Scottish Tactical Voting Alliance played a key role in alerting the media to the possibilities for a Tory meltdown, in making opposition party candidates and agents aware of the electoral potential in their own constituencies and in promoting tactical voting with the electorate in the run-up to polling day.

Under a fair and representative proportional electoral system tactical voting will, of course, become redundant. It was encouraging to read Richard Burden MP's affirmation that Labour in government still had electoral reform firmly on the agenda (Letters, 9 May). Grot found in their campaigning up and down the UK that most tactical voters were "switching" in order to enable the end of Tory monopoly power and therefore the possibility of fundamental constitutional change – not as an exclusive confirmation of approval of the "switch" party's own agenda.

The new government needs to be keenly aware that tactical voters are looking for them to deliver on their manifesto commitments – sooner rather than later.

RICHARD DENTON-WHITE  
Co-Chair, Get Rid of Them (Grot)  
London N16

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## Adoption for unloved children

Sir: The disingenuousness of Cardinal Hume and the Pro-Life lobby towards abortion is that they seem to have no concern for the children who would otherwise have been born, despite the Cardinal's assertion that "the frightening problem of children born without love or commitment in unstable situations must be addressed" ("A manifesto for moral and spiritual problems", 6 May).

I have been a GP in a fairly favoured area (the Isle of Wight) for over 30 years, and in that time have seen many children born "without love or commitment".

A teenage girl has an illegitimate baby by a boyfriend who after a few months gets fed up with a crying baby and leaves. A while later a new boyfriend moves in and a second baby is born, but he too leaves in time and a third boyfriend moves in.

Now a third baby arrives by which time baby number one is aged four or five and is behaving as all young children do. This angers boyfriend number three who proceeds to abuse the youngster who lives in an atmosphere of fear and hatred, often abetted by the mother. What kind of a future has he or she? Research has shown that abused children turn out to be abusive parents.

I would entirely endorse the Cardinal's view on abortion if he and others of his opinion would couple it with the demand that all

children born into such a situation should be compulsorily put up for adoption. This would be in the best interests of the child who has no choice; the parents have made theirs.

There is a shortage of children for adoption and there are many childless couples who are longing to give an unwanted baby a secure and loving home.

I agree that this policy is draconian, but these children are exposed to a draconian existence. Are we really to ignore their plight? This policy, apart from giving these children the best chance in life, would to some extent obviate the need for the NHS to spend a large amount of money on assisted fertilisation, and would give untold pleasure to otherwise childless couples.

Dr P D HOOPER  
Chale,  
Isle of Wight

Sir: George Garner (Letters: "Abortion can be a loving solution", 8 May) displays typical Anglican fudge.

Surely the reason women are faced with abortion in this "imperfect world" is because they cannot look to the community for support? As Christians, we should be leading the way in turning this imperfect world upside down and reflecting the love and compassion of Christ to women faced with this terrible dilemma.

Taking life, however you pretty it up, can never be justified.

JILL ARMSTEAD  
Felpham, West Sussex

## Power of charities to be monitored

Sir: You comment in your editorial ("A tighter rein for voluntary bodies", 5 May), apropos the difficulties being experienced by the National Confederation of Parent Teacher Associations that "the Charity Commission has powers of supervision but often seems unable to head off problems".

Contrary to the impression you give we are in fact conducting an investigation into the situation in the NCPTA. The Charities Act 1993 has given the Charity Commission powers to take the sort of preventive action your leader rightly invites. Its monitoring provisions, which are this year coming into effect, require charities with an annual income or expenditure of more than £10,000 to send the commission their accounts and report of activities annually. The commission is committed to use their powers and resources precisely in order to enable us to anticipate problems where possible and to use our powers of intervention to put things right where, despite monitoring, difficulties have arisen.

As you elegantly put it, charities occupy "public space" and must be both independent and accountable. It is the Charity Commission's task to uphold the independence of charities while making them properly accountable. We now have the power – and resolution – to achieve that.

R J FRIES  
Chief Charity Commissioner  
Charity Commission  
London SW1

## Spitalfields site is a closed shop

Sir: Can Jonathan Glancey (9 May) really believe that Sir Norman Foster's proposed Little (London International Financial Futures Exchange) buildings – a "financial behemoth" on a Spitalfields site as large as the Royal Albert Hall – will conjure up the spirit of the old fruit and veg halls or that a "testosterone-driven" trading floor is a street market "in only slightly different dress"?

In fact the proposed development has far more in common with the "titanic" Broadgate development opposite Spitalfields and the colossal Amro Bank headquarters currently being erected on its flanks, than with the sprawling, messy, heterogeneous life of a market. A trading floor, even one with glass walls, is not an open public space (or will we be allowed to wander in and bring the kids at weekends?) but a very specialist kind of closed shop.

Far from being bold and exciting, Sir Norman's proposals are predictably of a piece with the drive to annex Spitalfields to the City. More bars and cafes, sandwich outlets and designer shops, not to mention 13 floors of a futures exchange, seem thrilling to Mr Glancey. Those who live and work here may well feel it's just more of the same.

ALISON LIGHT  
London E1

## Safer cycle lanes

Sir: Cycling along footpaths and one-way streets the wrong way has nothing to do with disrespect for the law (Letters, 6 May). It reflects the woeful lack of provision for cyclists. Enlightened authorities provide cycle lanes to make it safer to cycle on the road, and special cycle lanes to make it possible for cyclists to go the wrong way down a one-way street. Cycling then becomes safer and more convenient, and we all benefit.

HUGH HOLLINGHURST  
Liverpool

## Party fun

Sir: You report that the Conservative Party leadership candidate John Redwood wishes to restore a sense of "fun in Conservative politics" ("Fun-seeking Redwood goes in quest of converts", 7 May).

I would like to set his mind at rest. Millions of British citizens derived immense fun from the performance of the Conservative Party on 1 May. I look forward to seeing the Conservative Party, whether under John Redwood or not, providing similar pleasure at the next general election.

BRIAN TUTT  
London EC2

## Presidential fine

Sir: The courts have just imposed massive fines to deprive a fraudster of his ill-gotten gains (Report, 9 May). The UN, through the International Court at the Hague, should do the same to President Mobutu, whose personal aggrandisement deprived his country's public and municipal infrastructure of proper maintenance. This would only be a starter towards the rebuilding of the ravage done to this potentially rich but poverty-stricken country and be a warning to any future dictator.

KENNETH C MCRAE  
Castle Douglas



## It's time to pick on the peers

Renewal means fulfilling the pledge now, Conor Gearty says. Then there will be scope for much more

It seems unlikely that reform of the House of Lords will figure in the Queen's Speech on Wednesday, while incorporation of the European Convention on Human Rights has made a late and apparently successful bid for an appearance. If that proves to be the outcome, then the nation's constitutional priorities are the wrong way round. Of course, after 18 years of misrule, Labour is swamped by proposals for change to our form of government, and some ordering of initiatives is inevitable. But two principles should underpin this process in these vital opening months.

The first is that of democratic renewal. This is not the same as constitutional reform, a point neatly illustrated by Gordon Brown's transfer last week of the responsibility for setting interest rates to the unelected and, at present, largely unaccountable Bank of England. The proposal to incorporate the convention also fails to offer democratic renewal. Even its supporters admit that the change would transfer large areas of political power away from Westminster to the judges on The Strand, thereby disempowering further the politicians who received such an outstanding vote of confidence on 1 May.

On the Lords, Labour's manifesto unconditionally promised that "the right of hereditary peers to sit and vote in the House of Lords [would be ended by statute]". This may not look like a democratic breakthrough. The prospect of shadowy political hacks in second-hand ermine voting as directed by the party leaders who "ennobled" them does not set the democratic pulse racing. But this is where we come to the second axiom needed in the party's first forays into constitutional change – the principle of political momentum.

On Lords reform, the party has also committed itself to the appointment of a "committee of both Houses ... to

### The modest proposals on devolution are a time bomb

undertake a wide-ranging review" of possible further changes and to bring forward proposals for reform. A short Bill disenfranchising the hereditary peers would meet little opposition this summer, particularly if it allowed certain of these ancient nobles to become life peers for voting purposes. The Bill could be accompanied by establishment of the proposed committee, which could engage in the thinking and the public education necessary to make more radical democratic reform appear obvious and inevitable.

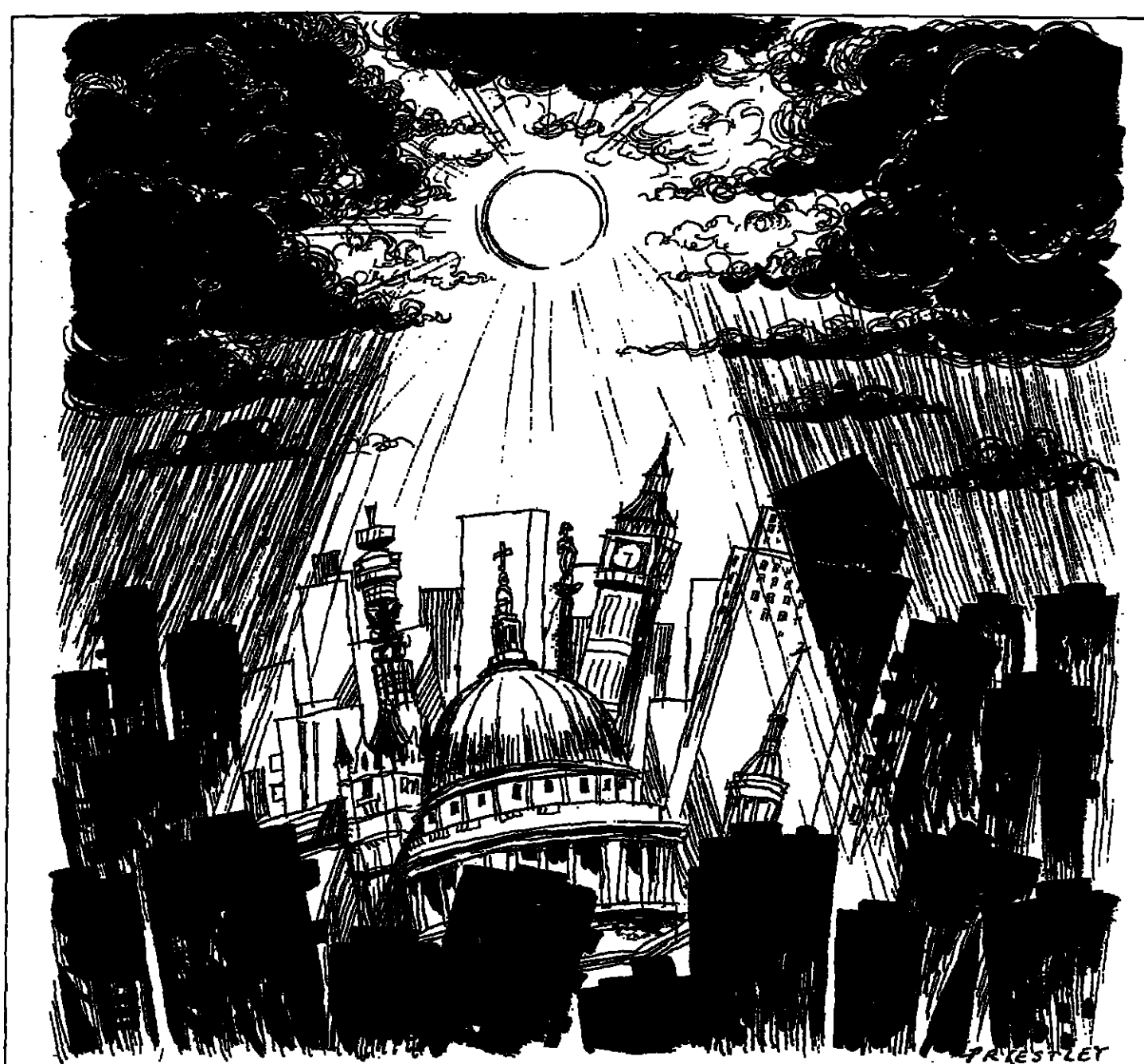
This principle of political momentum is not strengthened by incorporation of the European Convention, a move which will end the debate on human rights protection before it has properly begun. Much better would be an all-party select committee on how best our rights and liberties can be protected. Something similar has been promised on electoral reform, where an independent commission is to recommend a proportional alternative to the first-past-the-post system. Even Labour's extremely modest proposals on devolution contain a ticking time bomb for Scottish and Welsh assemblies whose demands for greater power will not be resistible indefinitely.

The Government is thus releasing into the political firmament a number of strong and autonomous semi-official bodies whose determination to achieve more radical change will be difficult for it to resist in future.

Of course it can reasonably be asked why, backed by its huge popular vote, Labour should not set out immediately to reform the British constitution. This is to fail to see quite how much damage to the language of politics has been done in the Thatcher/Major period. To attempt to undo all of this in one broad sweep might prove a catastrophic failure, as was the case with Labour's grand ure, as was the case with Labour's grand ure, as was the case with Labour's grand ure.

Public faith in the value of politics will not be restored overnight. Truly radical change will be possible when the defence of the hereditary principle, defended government and the current system of voting find themselves perceived as "loony reactionaries" in the same way that many London Labour councils were made to appear in the 1980s. If a life to be "loony left" in the 1980s. If a life to be "loony left" in the 1980s. If a life to be "loony left" in the 1980s.

The writer is Professor of Law at King's College London.



# At last, Londoners rule themselves OK

by Polly Toynbee

At long last London is on the verge of a miraculous renaissance. Labour's directly elected mayor and assembly promise a democratic revolution greater than anything since women got the vote. After London, all our other great cities will get mayors, heralding an earthquake in the distribution of political power. The short 10 days since the election have shown us how political symbolism matters as much as substance. So the cities will rise again, as in the great days of Joseph Chamberlain. Wait and see.

London is one of the most benighted zones in the country. *Newsweek*, *Vanity Fair* and *Women's Weekly* may say it's cool. Fine, but that is a delightful accident. Foreign *Ab Fab* editors tripping in for London Fashion Week and a quick zip around Harvey Nichols, the Oxo Tower and Groucho's see only a sliver of London. They do not travel on the Tube or use the hospitals; the only estates they see are in *Country Life*. They are like the jetsetters of Beirut who drank daiquiris on catamarans along the Corniche while bombs fell in the suburbs.

Rudderless London has no government, no voice and no one to complain to, just a hotchpotch of boroughs. Try to find out where power lies and it leads down Whitehall labyrinths, caverns measureless to any mere citizen. Who runs London now? The Environment Secretary, who has devolved power to his junior minister. A Cabinet Sub-Committee on London, a Whitehall Government Office for London, a London Planning Advisory Committee, a London Boroughs Grants Committee, a Transport Committee, a Waste Disposal Committee, a Parking Committee – all crushed under Whitehall's dead hand.

Yet how London is hated and resented among the rest of the country, as if we had it all. These days the word "metropolitan" is spat out as a term of abuse. The nation feels that the blood has been sucked out of local government and all power poured into the vampire Westminster – and they blame London, unjustly. For we who live under the shadow of Big Ben suffer greater powerlessness than most of them. Scotland and Wales complain vigorously – but London has had far more of its life crushed out in the last 20 years. When polled, 80 per cent have said consistently over the years that they want London government – but the capital (12 per cent of the British population) has been sunk deep in the apathy of hopelessness, unlike the noisy Scots (8 per cent) who thrive.

A few great national institutions that happen to be placed in a small part of the West End draw

vast lottery funds – and London gets the blame. In fact, per capita, London has had less than Scotland or Northern Ireland. And if you discount the national institutions, then Londoners have done badly for local politics.

Reporting of London events is worse than anywhere in Britain – for lack of any city-wide figurehead to make news. National news editors, afraid of the London loathing factor, shy away from London council stories. Inside the BBC newsroom, the law was "Get out of town". London has precious little local press of value. The *Evening Standard* sees itself mainly as a national with London society chic – good campaigns on the Tube and hospitals, but little reporting on what goes on in the town halls. London radio stations are even less

### 'We who live under the shadow of Big Ben suffer great powerlessness ... and are unjustly blamed for the vampire Westminster'

interested; the BBC's *South East News* is a bad joke; and ITV's *London Tonight* is a misnomer if ever there was one. Is it surprising that fewer people vote in local elections in London than anywhere else? In some areas it sinks below 30 per cent. Virtually no one knows their borough council leader's name, let alone their ward councillors. Democracy is all but dead.

A referendum for London will be a walk-over. The only people opposed to an elected mayor are the doyens of the no-smoking rooms of London local authorities, jealous of the power they wield with so little scrutiny. The last thing they want is a charismatic mayor, stealing their teeny murmur of thunder; London MPs fear a mayor for the same self-interested reason.

Now we need to know how all this is going to work. The mayoral elections should start with primaries within each political party, so that the people, not the parties, choose the candidates, reviving local party membership. The French presidential model, with a single, transferable vote and several rounds, would ensure that an extremist who may capture their party, as Livingstone did, does not get elected by the popular vote. The race will be genuinely open to independents, rewarding candidates of flair: no more back-bench bug-

gies and party hacks. The mayor may sweep in on a party ticket, but would be free to oppose it at will; the direct approval of Londoners will be far more important than any central party directive. One thing is certain: the London mayoral campaign will be an electoral defibrillator, jump-starting the apathetic London voters into life. Local politics will be fun – imagine that.

What of the assembly? This will be a real test of New Labour's credentials, pitted against entrenched old Labour interests. Tony Blair, persuaded by Margaret Hodge, was seized by the idea of directly elected mayors. But the massed ranks of MPs who come from local government will want to give all power to the assembly and none to the mayor. If this happens, the whole enterprise will be dead in the Thames before it begins.

If the mayor is going to shine, she needs power to act, and responsibility to take the blame. So the assembly should have power only to scrutinise, criticise, be consulted, demand answers and make a noise – not to run the show. Ultimate power must rest with the mayor. But she would not directly run some vast bureaucracy. She would take public responsibility because she, with her cabinet, would set the budget and make all the appointments to the boards of the separate agencies – transport, planning, police, rubbish, etc. The assembly should have the right to be consulted over the budget and appointments, but no more than that.

There will be a strong lobby to give the elected assembly most power. But the assembly will suffer from a real democratic deficit. If no one knows their borough councillor, voters will have even less knowledge of their London assembly councillor, at one further remove. It will be democratically unsafe to vest power in a body that was effectively unaccountable. The mayor has to take the flak, because everyone will know the mayor.

Then there is the question of tax. The mayor needs to be able to raise money of her own. If the Scots can, why not Londoners, if they vote for it? As the old GLC found, it's a tricky problem in London: outer boroughs such as Bromley objected vehemently to paying money for inner city projects, though the boroughs already contribute a precept. Useful devices would be road pricing, parking and tourist taxes, falling upon users themselves.

Here is a recipe for real radical change. Once London has tried it, every city will want their own elected mayor. Every city council will try to thwart it – but the people will win. There is no knowing quite where this new power will lead: it will develop an exciting impetus of its own. But local politics will never be boring again.

## Let's play fantasy secret love child

If you set your mind to playing "fantasy secret love child", the possibilities are endless. Prince Charles's jutting ears could be explained by a private assignation between the Queen and Mr Spock, for instance, with rumours that the Duke of Edinburgh is a bit of a rake providing a cunning cover.

Yet this weekend's headline-stealing claim that Paula Yates, television presenter and professional pop star, is the secret love child of Hughie Green – aka Mr *Opportunity Knocks*, the talent show host – would have to be filed under You-Couldn't-Make-It-Up. The thought that the man responsible for inflicting Freddie Starr, Little and Large and Lena Zavaroni on the poor British nation had also played his part in producing Paula is almost inconceivable.

Until yesterday, Miss Yates's fam-

ily tree ran like this. She was the daughter of Heller Toren, a beautiful actress, and Jess Yates, a religious broadcaster known as The Bishop until a dramatic fall from grace. (He had an affair with an actress 31 years his junior, and had to be smuggled out of a television studio in a car boot.) But at Hughie Green's funeral on Friday, his long-time friend Noel Botham used a farewell address to claim that dear Hughie had a love child, whom Mr Botham has now identified as Paula Yates. Yesterday, however, Mrs Toren vehemently denied Mr Botham's allegation, stating that Paula was conceived with Jess Yates a month after their marriage and "born the following year in peace and harmony".

Celebrity love stories are, however, always good for a gossip. Hence the mileage in another of this week-

end's allegations: the story of a baby Beate. An ordinary young man who had spent the whole of his 33-year-old life in blissful anonymity as Philip Paul Howarth of Uxbridge, Middlesex, was "revealed" by his mum, Anita Cochrane, as the secret son of Sir Paul McCartney, with whom she enjoyed a brief affair. The truth is known only to the two of them; Sir Paul has denied the allegations. Yet what is amazing is public surprise that the rich and famous may have secret liaisons and secret offspring.

Money may not buy you love, but the combination of fame and fortune is an asset when it comes to feticion. Martin Amis was already the acclaimed author of *The Rachel Papers* and *Dead Babies* when he enjoyed a fling with the writer Lamorna Heath in 1975. He was revealed last year as the father of her daughter Delilah, now 21.

Of course, ordinary people do it too. Some estimates put the number of children not sired by the mother's partner as high as one in 10. The thought is an encouraging one. For those who squirm at the parentage they have been allotted, the option is there to play "fantasy secret love child" and choose their own.

The *Independent's* diarist, Bridget Jones, could take comfort from the thought that her nightmare mother might really be someone else's. Pop star Michael Jackson could take the delusion that he is white even further. And Paula Yates' daughters, Fifi Tridibelle, Peaches, Pixie and Heavenly Hiraani Tiger Lily, could renounce all kinship with their mother. With names like that, who could blame them?

Louise Jury

## So where were you when Portillo fell?



Miles Kingston

Even though the election was nearly two weeks ago, which means that the next one must be less than five years away and getting closer all the time, people I have not seen since then are still coming up and saying "Great, wasn't it?" They never say what they are talking about, but I always know. They don't mean the Eurovision Song Contest or the welcome arrival of rain. They mean the election night.

Now, it stands to reason that a lot of people who sat up were Tory voters, who don't think it was such a great night, but I haven't heard anyone going around saying "Terrible, wasn't it?" Nor have I heard of anyone going unwittingly up to a Tory voter, saying "Great, wasn't it?" and getting a punch in the nose. The general agreement is that it was a great night, even if you didn't like the result – a bit like a football match in which one side was so awesomely good that even the other side's supporters couldn't help admiring the goal-scoring.

My interlocutors then usually go on to pick out a particular moment for praise, usually the moment when Michael Portillo's defeat was announced.

"Did you see the moment when Portillo realised he had been beaten?" is the usual remark, varied with "Did you see the moment when young what's his name, the Labour bloke, Twigg, realised that he'd actually beaten Portillo?" Close runners-up to this are "Did you see Mellor losing his rag?" and "Did you see Neil Hamilton get his comeuppance?" but it is definitely the Portillo moment that gets the prize. You can see why, in a way. Here was the leading contender for the Tory leadership being ousted from the contest, rather like the chief suspect being killed off in the last-but-one act, so you suddenly have to revise all your ideas of the denouement.

At one point I was reminded of that other legendary question: "Do you remember where you were when Kennedy was killed?" Yes, I still do. I was in a small flat at 44 Addison Road, London W8, and if I had known then what I know now I would have turned to my wife and said: "Well, of course, it's sad in a way when a president gets killed, but it's probably the best thing that could have happened to Kennedy's career, as he will now never have his name blackened by the Vietnam

war but will go down in history as a good guy, even though they will make too many movies about him and his lovely widow will marry a fat Greek millionaire ..."

But nobody says, "Do you remember where you were when Portillo was ousted?" because they know the answer: "I was slumped in front of a TV set with a glass in my hand, cheering raucously, hoarsely and not very politely."

That, however, is not my answer. To be truthful, I missed Portillo's comeuppance. Whether I was making a cup of tea, or fast asleep, or flicking around to see if there was anything better on the other side, I just didn't see it. I did see David Mellor staring into a non-parliamentary future, perhaps seeing all his consultations melt away and getting childishly angry. I saw Malcolm Rifkind looking rueful. I saw Forsyth and Lang look equally rueful. (Incidentally, could the British Tourist Board erect a big sign somewhere in the Lake District saying: "Last Tory Seat Before John O'Grada's"? But I never did see Michael Portillo exit stage left, pursued by a vengeful electorate. And I feel cheated.

So here is what I suggest. A video should be issued of Election Night '97 showing those moments which people still talk about, and which a lot of us missed. The Neil Hamilton moment. The Mellor fiasco. The Waldegrave moment, if there was one. These should all be joined to clips of interviews with Portillo, Hamilton, Mellor etc, taken before the election result, with them predicting glorious victory. This video will then take pride of place on my shelf next to the other relic of Election '97, the Referendum Party video.

Which reminds me that I haven't unwrapped that yet. I really must have a look at it some time.

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# Footsie's rip-roaring performance forces many analysts to play new tune

The stock market has again confounded the experts. Few, if any, forecast a rip-roaring springtime run lifting Footsie to more than 4,600 points - the sort of level optimistic souls predicted for the year-end.

The sheer size of Labour's majority and the subsequent resounding blue chips display is prompting many strategists to play a new tune.

Footsie was at a peak a few days before John Major signalled the May Day poll. Since then it has climbed more than 200 points, achieving its longest uninterrupted winning streak for four years.

It could have much further to go, Ian Scott at Lehman Brothers suggests it could be approaching 10 per cent undervalued. He likes the "positive backdrop" for equities, including the rich cash hoards of the institutions with pension funds "at the top end of their historic range with the only precedent being at the time of

the Gulf crisis". Panmure Gordon is in a similar mood, predicting 5,000 by the year-end. Still, it is not all unbridled cheer.

ABN Amro House Revett's Mark Brown has revised his Footsie targets to 4,500 for the year-end and summer next year. Goldman Sachs remains cautious although it seems to be threatening to become more enthusiastic and Richard Jeffrey at Charterhouse Tiney is still, remarkably, on 4,100 for next month and 4,000 for the year-end.

The Footsie constituents have, as usual, turned in an uneven performance. Without the strength of money shares and most consumer sectors the index display would have been uninspiring. Utilities have made a reasonable contribution with mining and services offering little support. The conglomerates, engineers and others in the general manufacturing sector have had a torrid time.

It has also been a split market. As the blue chip index has tested new highs, the second- and third-tierers have limped lamely behind, even failing to fully enjoy their near-traditional bright start to the year.

The FTSE 250 index, for example, is still well below its peak and looking decidedly jaded. The strength of sterling, the possibility of higher interest rates here and in the US, and the looming Budget could take their toll of blue chips although the sheer exuberance of financials, with the ongoing need for institutions to build stakes, should remain a bullish influence. New York's future direction could also be crucial to sentiment.

Andrew Cates and Andrew Roberts at UBS expect Gordon Brown's debut Budget to tighten the fiscal stance by some £3bn - plus a £5bn, or thereabouts, windfall tax. Acquisitive ScottishPower,

one of the likely windfall casualties, is due to produce year's figures on Thursday. A significant surge to around £545m from £404.8m is expected.

There are hopes the arrival of chairman Sir Christopher Hogge will arrest the decline. It is early days yet but tomorrow's interim figures will be anxiously examined for evidence he is making his presence felt. He has rejected the view that Allied should be broken into two stand-alone companies - pubs and spirits.

The group has abandoned its original business - brewing. One of Margaret Beckett's first jobs at the Board of Trade will be to decide whether Bass,

## STOCK MARKET WEEK

### DEREK PAIN

Stock market reporter of the year

## Share spotlight

Share spotlight

which bid nearly a year ago for Allied's Carlsberg-Teley brewing interest, will be allowed to clinch the deal.

Even if she rules against Bass, Allied's £1.35bn against £1.26bn. Last week's figures from Hongkong Telecom failed to draw any clue about its future relationship with its 58 per cent-owned subsidiary.

There are hopes that details, or at least some indication about the deal with the Chinese government, will emerge with Cable's figures.

Its overpowered rival, BT, also has a big deal in its sights. MCI of the US. There is also its signalled move into entertainment broadcasting. Year's figures should be £3.62bn, up from £3.50bn.

Hanson and one of its former divisions, Imperial Tobacco, are also in the reporting frame. Hanson, the building materials rump of the four-way demerger, should manage

satisfy the thirst for spirits, is thought to be in line for a modest interim profits increase to £470m.

Cable & Wireless should ring in with profits comfortably ahead, around £1.35bn against £1.26bn. Last week's figures from Hongkong Telecom failed to draw any clue about its future relationship with its 58 per cent-owned subsidiary.

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Hanson and one of its former divisions, Imperial Tobacco, are also in the reporting frame. Hanson, the building materials rump of the four-way demerger, should manage

interim profits around £75m, believes Leslie Kent at MeesPierson. He regards New Hanson as a "very, very fine Anglo-American building and construction player".

Imps, after 10 years of Hanson dominance, is now enjoying its freedom although it operates in a mature market where competition is increasing.

As an independent company the old Imperial managed to spread its wings. Now it has turned a full circle and, stripped of such diversifications as Courage brewing and Golden Wonder crisps, is forced to rely on cigarettes and tobacco. Half-year profits are expected to be around £140m, with £325m on the cards for the year.

Safeway, the superstores chain, could produce year's results of £425m (£401m) and Burton's revival should continue with interim results of £110m up from £88.1m.

Mid Value	Stock	Weekly	Index
£M		Price	FTSE
4400	Alcohol Beverages	100	100
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Mid Value	Stock	Weekly	Index
£M		Price	FTSE
4400	Alcohol Beverages	100	100
200	Alcohol Beverages	100	100
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# business & city

Business news desk: tel 0171-298 2636 fax 0171-298 2098  
BUSINESS & CITY EDITOR: JEREMY WARNER

Stamp of authority: The PO's demand for more commercial freedom wins strong backing

## Beckett rules out move to sell Post Office

Chris Godsmark  
Business Correspondent

Margaret Beckett, the President of the Board of Trade, yesterday emphatically ruled out any moves by the Government to privatise the Post Office, but strongly backed the organisation's long-standing demand for more commercial freedom.

Insisting that Post Office privatisation was against the public interest, Mrs Beckett indicated that a sell-off or partial share sale had never been on Labour's agenda. Her comments were being interpreted in Westminster as an attempt to assert her control over the trade and industry brief from any moves by the Treasury to use the Post Office to raise much needed cash. A partial flotation of half the Post Office could raise £2bn.

"We certainly aren't considering it and we never have been," Post Office executives are understood to have drawn up several privatisation options in the months before the election and held exploratory discussions with Labour figures.

**This story has emerged several times. It did not have validity then and doesn't have it now**

The Post Office is one of the few remaining state assets with the potential to raise billions from a share sale.

Two strategies are thought to have been highlighted. One would be to sell 49 per cent of the Post Office, retaining the controlling stake in government hands.

At the same time it would gain the operating freedom to raise money on the financial markets independently of the Treasury and buy other

businesses or enter into joint ventures. The other option is to sell at least 51 per cent, with the state hanging on to a "golden share".

Mrs Beckett's tough stance will come as no surprise given her reputation in industry circles as being instinctively opposed to selling off state assets. Gordon Brown, the Chancellor, is committed to making an inventory of national assets to examine if any were no longer needed.

Another signal apparently came with the appointment of Ian McCartney, seen as linked to the "old Labour" agenda, as the minister with direct responsibility for the Post Office. He replaced Kim Howells, a well-known advocate of greater commercialisation, who went to the Department of Education and Employment.

The Post Office put a brave face on the comments, insisting that no privatisation plan was about to be submitted to the Department of Trade and Industry. A spokeswoman added: "There is no plan. It's just absolute speculation."

Though Mrs Beckett's comments will disappoint the Post Office, senior executives will be heartened by her backing for



On your bike: The PO wants to compete more effectively

Photograph: Scotland Today

greater commercial freedom, a move the Conservatives consistently failed to deliver. Mrs Beckett explained: "We are very keen to explore with the Post Office the potential for commercial freedom. It would certainly be a very good idea."

She added that at this stage no firm options were being

discussed yet, though meetings with the Post Office are likely to be held within weeks. A possible blueprint would be to turn the Post Office into a 100 per cent government-owned company, free from Treasury spending limits. The Post Office is due to contribute £330m this year to government coffers

through the external finance limit. Managers have attacked the scale of the payments many times. They argue that it depletes much needed investment capital.

This would allow the Post Office to compete more effectively with private carriers such as TNT and Federal Express.

## Interflora board fired by members

Chris Godsmark

Flower power yesterday defeated the entire board of Interflora, the UK's largest flower delivery network. The 11-strong management committee was sacked during a marathon extraordinary meeting called by rebel members fighting the biggest shake-up proposed in the organisation's 74 year history.

Around 1,500 people attended the five-hour gathering at Warwick University, representing about 1,000 of Interflora's 2,500 voting members. The series of motions, to throw out the board, were approved by the smallest of majorities in the ballots. The result could scupper proposals to turn Interflora into a fully fledged company with the possibility of a stock market flotation.

David Parry, Interflora's chairman, immediately called a postal ballot covering all the membership to clarify the issue. The egm then proceeded to vote on whether to install six new board members backed by the rebels. "The board have been delected with immediate effect. We need to sit down and digest the result," said an Interflora spokesman.

The rebels were unhappy with plans by Interflora, an association of independent florists acting in a similar way to a club, to shake-up its membership rules. The changes would raise the annual mem-

bership fee from £300 to £1,750, but reduce the charge for each customer transaction from £2.99 to 60p. The aim is to challenge the competitive threat from rivals such as Marks & Spencer and the supermarkets.

Interflora, which has annual delivery orders worth £100m, has insisted this will not disadvantage smaller florists, a claim it said was backed up by informal regional soundings of members taken over the past few months. "Members will find that the alteration in charges balances out for the vast majority," said an Interflora spokesman.

The rebels had wanted to delay the changes, a tactic which the management had always admitted could succeed given the Interflora's rudimentary voting structure. The egm motion needed support from just a simple majority of those florists attending. The rebels, led by Leeds florist Bev Wood, had previously claimed to have about 450 supporters.

Interflora had been examining ditching its mutual status and turning itself into a plc. Members, who all own their own businesses, would become shareholders in a newly established company running Interflora's administrative and marketing operations, based in Sleaford in Lincolnshire. They had hoped to put their commercial strategy to Interflora's annual meeting in October.

## Steel makers oppose EU tax

Michael Harrison

The Chancellor, Gordon Brown, was last night urged to veto plans by the European Commission to impose a carbon tax on member states, with a warning from heavy industrial energy users that it would hit jobs and competitiveness.

The plea came as the Chancellor prepared to attend his first meeting of EU finance ministers in Brussels today where proposals to harmonise excise duties on energy are due to be discussed.

The Commission has twice failed in attempts to introduce a carbon tax on environmental grounds, arguing that it would curb harmful emissions of the

greenhouse gas carbon dioxide. This time it is trying to get the tax through under the heading of harmonisation measures. Since it is a new tax, it requires unanimous support from all member states to become law.

The UK Steel Association, which represents all large producers including British Steel, has written to Mr Brown and other ministers including the new Minister for European Trade and Competitiveness, Sir David Simon, and the Secretary of State for Environment, Transport and the Regions, John Prescott, asking them to block the proposal.

Brian Clayton, the association's president, said: "A carbon energy tax is misguided and

wrong in principle, not least because it will fail in its stated objectives."

Mr Clayton claimed it would push up industry's costs without reducing energy consumption. This would force employers to shed jobs and erode their competitiveness with the result that manufacturers might be forced to relocate to cheaper countries outside the EU which were not committed to reducing CO2 emissions.

British Steel has already announced an acceleration of a cost-cutting programme that will see 10,000 jobs disappear over the next five years at a cost of £165m. Even without the threat of the carbon tax, the company is struggling to

respond to the appreciation of the pound and the increasing competitiveness of its European rivals.

Although there is a proposed exemption from the carbon tax for "metallurgical processes" it is unclear how widely this would apply. In any case, Mr Clayton said that even if the steel industry was exempted, the tax would still cause serious damage to its customers in manufacturing industry.

Two months ago the former chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, led opposition to the proposed tax at the last meeting of European finance ministers. Energy intensive industries are hoping Mr Brown will take a similarly robust stance.

## Treasury summons for pension firms

The heads of the 20 largest pension companies have been called to a meeting with Treasury economic secretary Helen Liddell on Wednesday, at which she will tell them to speed up compensation for the pensions mis-selling scandal or face action.

Of the 600,000 people who were identified as having been wrongly persuaded to switch from their company schemes to less favourable private pensions, only about 7,000 have so far been compensated. A Treasury spokesman said: "Mrs Liddell is making pensions mis-selling her first priority. She is coming from the consumer's point of view and is determined to meet the pension firms and find out

how they intend accelerating and improving compensation."

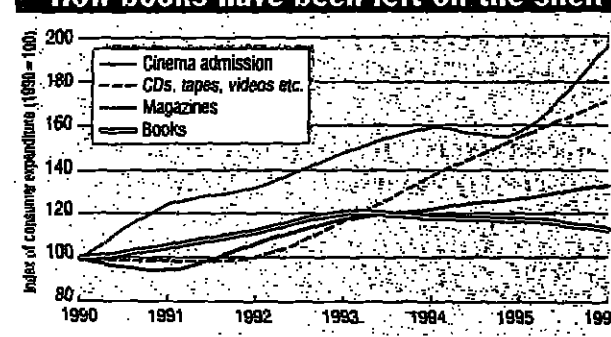
The spokesman added: "A lot have suffered from mis-selling - over half a million people - and a rather paltry number have been sorted out. That is not good enough and something needs to be done."

Although he would not say what sanctions Mrs Liddell had in mind, or what penalties might be imposed, he added: "She is expecting something to happen, and happen quickly."

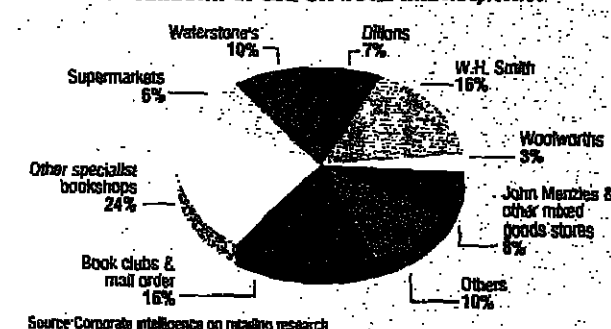
A spokesman for the Personal Investment Authority said: "We are very anxious that the review is moved forward now with speed - obviously the Government shares that view as well."

## Book sales hit as consumers turn over new leaf

How books have been left on the shelf



Breakdown of the UK book market, 1995/96



Source: Corporate intelligence on retailing research

Tom Stevenson  
Financial Editor

We're going to the cinema more often, listening to more music, but reading fewer books and buying them from different places and in different ways. According to a study to be published today, our shopping habits are changing as never before and nowhere more so than in the previously predictable world of the bookshop.

Further evidence emerges from Corporate Intelligence's UK Retail Report of the supermarkets' assault on the traditional high street, with figures showing sales of books by the giant grocery chains have reached £100m a year.

Although restricted in scope to best-sellers and children's books, the supermarkets have already stolen around 6 per cent of the market and are expected to reach a double-figure share soon.

The threat to local bookshops, the latest in a series of attacks on familiar local stores

such as chemists and dry cleaners, has been exacerbated by a twin threat from Internet retailing. Bookselling in cyberspace is growing apace at the expense of sales in the real world.

Despite the growing threats posed by supermarkets and the Internet, however, Corporate Intelligence believes the greatest challenge to traditional booksellers is the competition posed by other leisure goods such as music, videos and, most dramatically, the cinema. All have left book sales behind during the 1990s.

Consumer expenditure on cinema tickets has doubled over the past six years, while the amount we spend on CDs, tapes and videos is up by 60 per cent. Having outstripped magazine sales in the first years of the decade, books have even been left behind by periodicals.

Last year consumer spending on music, video, computer games and other software rose by 10.4 per cent while cinema admissions increased by 24.5 per

cent. Books, by contrast, declined by 4 per cent.

The latest figures confirm the difficulties facing the industry since the demise of the Net Book Agreement in September 1995 opened up the trade to discounting for the first time. Extending stores, introducing new facilities such as cafés and reading rooms, as well as price promotions, have failed to halt the decline.

WH Smith remains the country's largest bookseller with an estimated market share of 16 per cent, but it too is having to contend with the entry of Woolworths into the popular end of the market, where its sales are thought to have reached £50m.

On the Internet, sales of the only UK specialist, The Internet Bookshop, rose five-fold last year.

According to Corporate Intelligence, books are far better suited to Internet retailing than many other product categories. In contrast to clothing, customers do not need to touch or try them on prior to purchase,

while the sheer volume of books available means the type of search facilities available on the Net can save much time in finding a particular title.

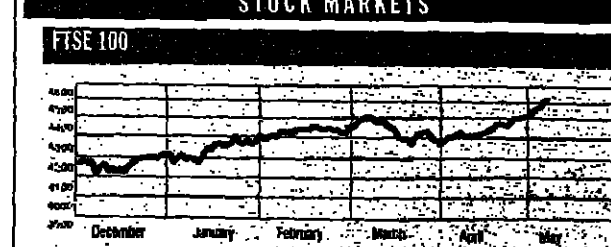
With the Internet growing rapidly and other electronic channels such as interactive television developing, many retailers are still attempting to stand in the path of the electronic marketplace, but experts say it is an unstoppable tide.

Retail sales on the Internet were valued at just \$500m last year but are predicted to rise to over \$6bn (£3.2bn) by the end of the decade.

Hoskyns, the business and information technology consultant, foresees electronic revenues of £21bn - that is 30 per cent of the UK market - within nine years.

The Nintendo generation, more comfortable with computers, is growing up and entering the job market. They will be much more at ease with shopping on-line than today's anxious 40-something technophobes.

### STOCK MARKETS



Index	Date	Week's chg	Change (%)	1996/97 High	1996/97 Low	Yield (%)
FTSE 100	4630.80	+175.3	+3.9	4830.90	4056.60	3.50
FTSE 250	4526.20	+28.1	+0.6	4729.40	4469.40	3.58
FTSE 350	2247.50	+71.2	+3.3	2247.50	2017.90	3.62
FTSE SmallCap	2208.08	+12.6	+0.5	2374.20	2178.29	3.02
FTSE All-Share	2208.01	+65.8	+3.1	2203.01	1989.78	3.48
New York	7189.53	+98.3	+1.4	7225.32	5032.94	1.73
Tokyo	19802.78	+288.0	+1.5	20180.92	17303.85	0.81
Hong Kong	13930.80	+849.1	+6.5	13930.80	12055.17	3.09
Frankfurt	3562.41	+102.0	+2.9	3568.28	2848.77	1.52

Source: FT Information

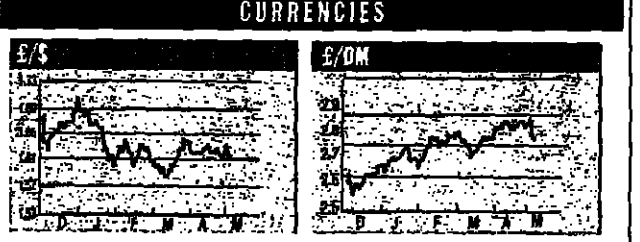
### INTEREST RATES



Money Market Rates				Bond Yields			
Index	1 Month	3 Month	1 Year	Index	1 Month	3 Month	1 Year
UK	6.25	6.93	7.01	8.14	7.08	8.24	
US	5.62	6.19	6.74	6.77	6.90	7.00	
Japan	0.56	0.87	2.48	2.51			
Germany	3.00	3.18	5.75	6.51	6.53		

Source: Reuters

### CURRENCIES



Pound vs. Dollar				Dollar vs. Yen			
Close	Week's chg	1 Year	5 Year	Close	Week's chg	1 Year	5 Year
\$ (London)	1.6194	+0.12c	1.5232	£ (London)	0.6175	-0.05	0.6565
\$ (New York)	1.6230	+0.10c	1.5223	£ (New York)	0.6185	-0.04	0.6569
DM (London)	2.7423	-5.47pt	2.3103	DM (London)	1.6994	-3.51pt	1.6196
¥ (London)	197.081	-18.00¢	198.542	¥ (London)	121.700	-5.035	104.745
£ Index	98.0	-1.7	84.4	£ Index	104.1	-1.9	96.1

Source: Reuters

### MAIN PRICE CHANGES

Rises - Top 3				Falls - Top 3			
Index	Price	Chg	% Chg	Index	Price	Chg	% Chg
Legal & Gen	481.5	32.5	12.2	Dairy	263	47	15.2
Bk of Scotland	414.5	43.8	11.8	BTR	230.5	30.5	11.7
Lloyds Tsb	620.5	84.5	11.8	Man Utd	805	52.5	6.0

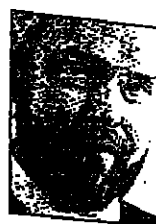
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GAVYN DAVIES

'Nobody feels comfortable about the uncompetitive pound, but it will not be the fault of the monetary policy committee if its strength continues'

## Critics of Bank independence miss the point

Amid the widespread welcome which has been given to the Chancellor's decision to make the Bank of England operationally independent in the setting of interest rates, there have been a few strongly dissenting voices. The critics see this dramatic step as just another in a long line of "irrevocable" British reforms designed to transform the monetary mechanism which have ended in subject failure – the latest, of course, being entry to the ERM in 1989.

Admittedly, the euphoric mood in the financial markets and the media on Tuesday was eerily reminiscent of the day that sterling joined the ERM, a decision that did not work out too well.

But Bank of England independence is a profoundly different matter from entering a fixed exchange rate system with narrow fluctuation bands. The point about the ERM – and this will apply in even starker terms if sterling joins the single European currency – is that interest rate decisions were externalised beyond the borders of the UK, and were taken by people (ie the Bundesbank) who did not include British economic variables in their set of objectives. Consequently, the setting of interest rates became somewhat random from the British point of view and, sadly, that randomness worked in strongly the wrong direction from 1989-92. There is no reason whatsoever why any of these problems need apply to Gordon Brown's new mechanism. The Bank's nine-person monetary policy committee (MPC) will be setting interest rates based solely on UK economic criteria, so while monetary decisions will be externalised beyond the borders of British politics, they will not be externalised beyond the borders of the UK itself. Unless a mass attack of insanity overpowers the nine separate individuals on the MPC, each of whom will be given an equal weight in interest rate decisions, there is no danger of base rates getting stuck at levels which are inappropriate for British requirements.

Why, then, make the change? The scatter

diagrams depicted in the two graphs basically sum up the case in favour more eloquently than a thousand pages of textbook economics. The horizontal axes measure the degree of independence of national central banks between 1973 and 1989, while the vertical axes measure inflation and output growth respectively.

It is immediately obvious that a greater degree of central bank independence has been associated with a lower rate of inflation, but that there has been no connection between independence and the growth of output. The implication which many economists have drawn is that it is possible to enjoy lower rates of inflation without any adverse costs in terms of output and jobs, by leaving interest rate decisions to central bankers.

Many economic studies – in fact, a remarkable 18 out of the 20 studies recently published – have now formally supported the results implied by the scatter diagrams shown here. In one of the most celebrated studies of the genre (*Institutions and Policies*, Grilli, Masciandaro and Tabel-

lini, *Economic Policy*, 1991), separate indices of bank independence were developed according to economic and political criteria respectively. (In fact, the sum total of these two indices is the basis for the graphs shown here.) The maximum possible score is 16, and Martin Brookes of Goldman Sachs estimates that the new arrangements for the Bank of England would result in a respectable score of 10. This is similar to several other central banks in Europe, though it is somewhat less than the scores achieved by the Bundesbank, the Federal Reserve, and the planned European Central Bank.

The reason for the difference is that the new Bank of England will be subject to political direction on matters such as the inflation target, whereas the Bundesbank and Federal Reserve are left to set these targets for themselves. Brookes has rather ingeniously used the econometric results of the Grilli study to deduce what the UK rate of inflation might have been over the period from 1973-89 if the Bank of England had at that time enjoyed the degree of independence which it will enjoy from now on.

He concludes that the inflation rate might have been expected to have been around 3.5 per cent per annum lower than the 10.5 per cent rate which was achieved. And remember that this reduction in inflation would have been won at no cost in terms of lost output, at least if the econometricians are to be believed.

Of course, the future gain to British inflation is likely to be much less than the 3.5 per cent per annum suggested by the history of the 1973-89 period, since we are already much closer to price stability than we were then. But let us assume that the independent Bank of England succeeds over time in reducing UK inflation to around 2-2.5 per cent per annum, the rate implied by the Government's inflation target.

Once the markets become comfortable that this will be the case, and build this expectation into their medium-term projections for inflation, the average yield on long-term government debt is likely to fall by at least one full percentage point, via a reduction in the inflation risk premium.

Eventually, this will reduce the Government's funding costs by around £3.5bn per

annum, an amount which can be used for extra public spending, or for tax cuts, by future chancellors. Since it will take many years for this to be fully reflected in debt service costs, Mr Brown may not himself be the chief beneficiary of this change, but his successors may have cause to thank him for last week's boldness.

Where does this leave the critics of Bank independence? Their case seems to be that the new MPC at the Bank will adopt "too hawkish" a stance on interest rate policy, that this will push the exchange rate upwards, and that this will eventually result in a renewed recession.

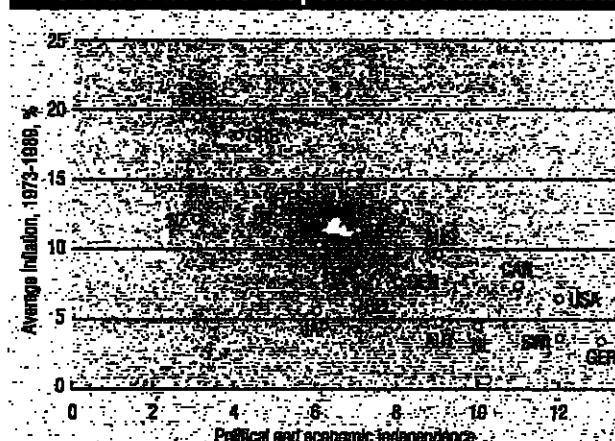
In particular, they argue that it will now be very difficult to conduct a co-ordinated switch in the fiscal/monetary mix, by raising taxes in the Budget and subsequently reducing base rates to get the exchange rate back down to competitive levels.

Obviously, there is a danger that the needs of domestic monetary policy will indeed force both base rates and sterling higher in coming months, but it is far from clear that the Bank's independence will make much difference to this. Eddie George made it perfectly apparent in his weekend interviews that he is sensitive to the behaviour of the currency, but that the health of the one quarter of the economy which is directly affected by the exchange rate cannot take precedence over the maintenance of the inflation target.

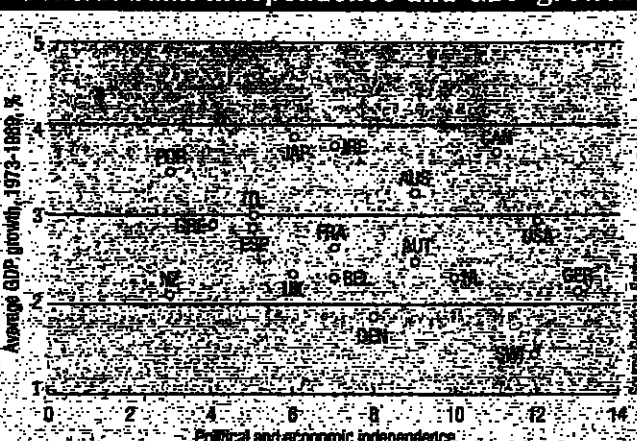
How would this have been any different if Gordon Brown had still been taking the base rate decisions? Only, presumably, if the Chancellor had been willing to take more risks with his own inflation objective, which would scarcely seem to make much sense this early in the Parliament. And if the Chancellor does decide to raise consumer taxes significantly in his forthcoming Budget, there is no reason the MPC should not take full account of this in future monetary meetings.

Nobody feels comfortable about the uncompetitive pound, but it will not be the fault of the MPC if its strength continues.

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## back page: a weekend at the Monaco grand prix

# Revving it up at a Riviera party

The noise begins at 9.01am, a fantastic, angry buzzing, an unearthly crescendo of whining, interspersed by feral barks, like a flock of mutant dentists' drills invading a sawmill. Gradually it settles into a more generalised clamour, like a giant wind rushing through a lot of spooky trees announcing the end of the world. And you can't see what is causing it. As you stand looking across the horseshoe bowl of Monte Carlo, across the streamlined turrets of yachts, powerboats and what looks like a posh designer car ferry in Monaco harbour, as you gaze at the terracotta roofs of the ancient principality, the Lego pent-houses perched on the cliff edge, the Fifties hotels with their overpopulated balconies and the waves crashing softly on to the shore of this Bakelite Riviera, there is no sign of a car anywhere. The Formula One machines are racing around the main roads of the city, but the view is occluded by guard rails and metal shutters to all but ticket-holders. Between the look of the place and the sound you're hearing, there is no

connection. It's like watching a film with the wrong soundtrack. In the harbour, the boys on *South Paw*, an elegant £1.9m white yacht, are recovering from the previous night's excesses. They are nine middle-aged businessmen from Birmingham, who have hired this glamorous craft for five days from its Caribbean owner, stuffed it with food, drink and party paraphernalia, and got stuck in. Last night, they were entertained by a brace of

cheesy chanteurs with a Hammond organ. The nine friends, convened by Tony Hewitt, a food manufacturer who supplies chocolate bits 'n' pieces to motorway service stations, drank champagne, beer and white wine (red might stain the carpets, and is banned), ate solid Black Country fare of hot dogs ("Fancy a sausage roll?") and sang Sixties classics



**John Walsh**

with ferocious energy. Halfway through "Mr Tambourine Man" they were visited by Johnny Herbert, the legendary British racing driver, who chatted agreeably and managed to avoid the advances of a predatory young thing from *The Mirror*. "It may sound a lot, £35,000 for five days," said Tony



Pleasure at a price: Birmingham businessmen drinking on the *South Paw*, a private boat moored in Monaco harbour - cost, £35,000 for five days

Photographs: Brian Harris

reuefully, "but split between nine of us, it works out at only four grand a head. Although some of the lads have told their wives it's £750 ..."

These are the Monaco pilgrims, drawn every year to the second-smallest independent state in Europe (after the Vatican) for the most glamorous of the racing season's 17 grands prix. It is also, by general consent, a venue that is wholly unsuitable for modern Formula One racing. Since the race is in the streets, there is nowhere spectators can get a complete view. The roads are so narrow that there's no room to overtake (one driver, trying to pass Niki Lauda at Casino Square some years ago, narrowly avoided crashing into the main lobby of the Hotel de Paris). And every corner of the twisty route which the world's top drivers must navigate 78 times is a potential death trap. Asked how he tended to approach the lethal La Rascasse hairpin bend, the veteran Bertrand Gachot

replied, "As if I was parking the car ..."

But the Monaco Grand Prix is about more than cars. A big-time sponsor such as Foster's, the lager people now owned by Scottish & Newcastle, might be accused of insensitivity if they linked up directly with the cars and racers (drink plus driving?); but it's the atmosphere of Euro-glitz style, the miasma of expensive, lous-eating fun that's worth buying into.

For their dispensation of untold millions of dollars they got a lot of signage. You hear a lot about signage - the placing of massive company names on mile-high banners strung across the roadway at any juncture where the world's television cameras may be pointing. And they get the ineffable pleasure of entertaining 27 German wholesalers to dinner at Loews Hotel, where Lamborghini's perch outside on the forecourt like metallic prostitutes, fingered, fondled and fancied by all, while inside the flotsam of backpackers, car-nuts and transcontinental seducers wanders up and down the hall between the Le Truffe restaurant and the casino in endless passeggiata.

"It doesn't come cheap," said Scottish & Newcastle's cigar-chewing commercial director, Alex Nicoll. "They won't let you book for one or two nights, it's got to be all five or nothing. And since the standard room rate in Monaco is £400 ... frankly, taking your clients over to the Melbourne Grand Prix is a better deal."

Over at the Paddock Club, a clearing house of sponsors, corporate entertaining and businesslike schmoozing, a man with a droopy moustache is tiding "I Got You Under My Skin" on the white baby grand. On the television monitors, the Canadian driver Villeneuve, the Finnish Hakkinen and the British boy David Coulthard, whose complicated love life was celebrated in the tabloids all last

week, are racing laps to win the crucial "pole position". Next to me sit Martin and Joan from Dubai, where they run a couple of bars mostly servicing the American navy and who are therefore a valuable client of Foster's. Staying at the super-exclusive Cap Martin hotel, they are half-appalled and half-impressed by their fellow guests, a party of 25 business types, mostly Irish living in England, who have rented, among other things, a black Rolls Corniche convertible, a Bentley Turbo and a Ferrari.

"One's a dentist, one's a merchant banker and there's one who says he's a construction worker in New York," says Joan suspiciously. "They said they had enough drink with them to last for three weeks. I don't know how they've lasted this long. You see them arriving back at the hotel just when we're coming down to breakfast. With these little French girls ..."

Also at the table are Andrew and Sam from Australia, who won a free trip to Monaco by drawing two aces at blackjack in a Melbourne casino. They are

ecstatic about the place, the drivers, the noise, the harbour, the lights in the hills at night, the gorgeousness of the Côte d'Azur, even the taste of the excessively slimy lump of pan-fried foie gras with arugula and apples in front of them - although they too have reservations about the German Ferrari Club at their hotel, with their obligatory trophybabes. Everyone, it seems, is sweetly concerned about the famously dignified Monégasque paradise turning into a licensed knocking shop.

The highlight of the pre-race engagements is the pit walkabout, in which privileged entertainees get to stroll along the line of stripped-down cars that will soon be competing for glory. Villeneuve's Renault is a big draw, but the crowd jostle most energetically for pictures beside Schumacher's Ferrari. Close up, it is a tiny, insubstantial object, apparently made of two-ply tin, its subcutaneous hide a tidy arrangement of black wiring, by comparison, Frenzen's Sauber is a horrible intestinal mess of large and small colons, with the word HYPE emblazoned on the side.

The mechanics are far from the grease-monkeys and oil-rag dispensers you'd expect: immaculate in Cetruti red and white shirts and shorts with dinky red socks, they tweak and fiddle with the dewheeled and eviscerated machines like gay American paramedics.

Eddie Irvine strides by, impossibly handsome in his Marlboro cap and shades. Damon Hill stands among his mechanics, thin-faced and nervy-looking, pulling his nose, wondering when his run of bad luck with the Arrows team will end. A couple of thirtysomething Schumacher wannabes stand around in mustard overalls, sweating visibly. Skinny matadors, transformed by Darth Vader helmets into macrocephalic samurai, they are (a little self-consciously) the essence of warlike posing.

The air is thick with testosterone. Fat and broken-veined credit analysts from Escher and Surbiton queue up to pose with a brace of Japanese babes in hot pants under an umbrella saying "Avex Group". Piles of fat black tyres are wheeled by,

some bald (dry weather), some pitted and scored (wet). The chequered flag is only hours away.

On the hills above Monaco, a crowd of ticketless opportunists is waiting for the action, a sea of red Ferrari baseball caps interrupted by Union flags (Hill, Coulthard, Irvine) and Maple Leafs (Villeneuve).

The roads are closed until 6pm. No taxi will take you anywhere for hours. You must walk the streets, past the crush in the Rue Grimaldi, past the children in their fashion accessory earphones, past the beaming and legless arbitrageurs on the poop of the yachts moored beside the Nouvelle Chicane, right across the city until you reach one of several high private vantage points leased *per diem* by the Page & Moy events organisers.

It turns out that they have hired the good yacht Southpaw for the duration of the race, from Mr Hewitt and his Brummie friends. It has cost them half what it costs Hewitt to lease the boat. Jesus, someone says, what a crowd of operators ...

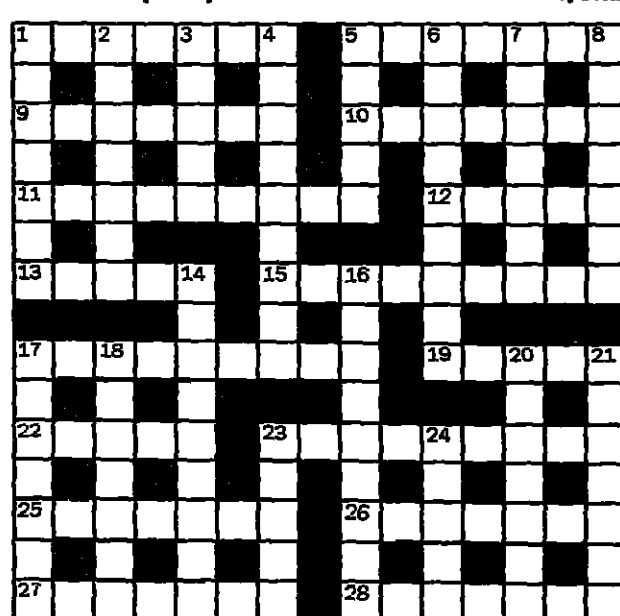


Reflective mood: a spectator in a car-crazy town

## THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No. 3296. Monday 12 May

By Fortin



### ACROSS

- 1 Withdraw force in error (4,3)
- 5 Bound to invest in proper theatre that's run down (7)
- 9 Second nature maybe to go slowly (7)
- 10 Soldiers finally beat and drive back the enemy (7)
- 11 Usually learning English another way (2,7)
- 12 Run rings round male European lover (5)
- 13 Brought back to manage Kent harbour (5)
- 15 Continued somehow to be overlooked (9)
- 17 Don't go along with the German sell off (9)
- 19 Positive one's taken in by water colour (5)
- 22 Girl's in prison I admit (5)
- 23 Isn't quick step music (4,5)
- 25 Meanwhile is healthy but without energy (7)
- 26 Asian country possessing a new union state (7)

- 27 Players are well-suited by her (7)
- 28 Number worry, but isn't any problem (2,5) DOWN

- 1 Proceed to contain one's ardour (7)
- 2 He lies about item of furniture (7)
- 3 Doesn't start to relent on many occasions (5)
- 4 Revolutionary change of policy? (9)
- 5 Fellow pupil receiving time goes wild (5)
- 6 There's a drunk standing in the river (9)
- 7 Staff member in charge causes argument (7)
- 8 Digital means of access? (3,4)
- 14 I'd pursue a way out of Greek site (9)
- 16 Chased up share account (9)
- 17 By the sound of it, did wrong again to cancel (7)
- 18 Crew scuffed quarter of sea creature (7)
- 20 Have a share in standard work (7)
- 21 American's bitter about ambassador, basically (2,5)
- 23 Mainly modest object in view (5)
- 24 Might he give one a golden handshake? (5)

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